

"Everything's a joke, everyone's a punchline."  
Verbally Expressed Humour in the American Television Series *Gilmore Girls*

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September 2010

# ITÄ-SUOMEN YLIOPISTO – UNIVERSITY OF EASTERN FINLAND

<b>Tiedekunta – Faculty</b> Filosofinen tiedekunta		<b>Osasto – School</b> Humanistinen osasto	
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<b>Työn nimi – Title</b> "Everything's a joke, everyone's a punchline." Verbally Expressed Humour in the American Television Series <i>Gilmore Girls</i>			
<b>Pääaine – Main subject</b>	<b>Työn laji – Level</b>	<b>Päivämäärä – Date</b>	<b>Sivumäärä – Number of pages</b>
Englanti	Pro gradu -tutkielma	X	7.9.2010 88
	Sivuainetutkielma		
	Kandidaatin tutkielma		
	Aineopintojen tutkielma		
<b>Tiivistelmä – Abstract</b>			
<p>This thesis deals with verbally expressed humour in the American television series <i>Gilmore Girls</i>. In this thesis, the ways in which verbally expressed humour is constructed and how it is used for both character setting and illustrating relationships between characters are explored. The thesis also explores how H. Paul Grice's conversational maxims are flouted for humoristic purposes.</p> <p>The source material consists of five episodes of <i>Gilmore Girls</i>. Four of them were from the first production season (2000) and one from the fourth (2003). The 127 examples of verbally expressed humour found from the material were divided into ten categories of verbally expressed humour and/or four categories of maxims. The focus of the analysis is, however, on the ways in which humour is used in the series.</p> <p>The study shows that verbally expressed humour is used for a variety of purposes in the series. The most frequent users of humour are the main characters, and their humour is therefore the most versatile although the protagonist, Lorelai Gilmore, is by far the most versatile user of humour. The study shows that humour between characters can, for example, be used for showing mutual appreciation and closeness or it may signal distance. Certain forms of humour, such as sarcasm and banter, even have distinct purposes since they are most often used for establishing and maintaining relationships.</p> <p>The humour in the series is also versatile, as it utilizes a variety of ways in which verbally expressed humour may be constructed. The two most important categories are sarcasm and banter, although the miscellaneous category of "saying things funny" is roughly as large. There is a lack of "traditional" humour – humour that is the key interest in traditional humour research – in the series, as there are only one case of joking and no cases of punning. This is understandable and, in a way, desirable since the humour in the series is witty and tries to avoid being predictable. The series also utilizes the possibility of engendering humour by flouting and breaking Grice's conversational maxims. However, because the cases of flouting a maxim may not have similarities other than the category to which it belongs to, the examples have been dealt with case by case.</p> <p>In this thesis I have shown that <i>Gilmore Girls</i> uses humour in a variety of ways and for a variety of purposes. Although the series is a scripted text, it uses humour in a similar way as it is used in the real, everyday life of the viewers which makes the series all the more interesting to study.</p>			
<b>Avainsanat – Keywords</b> verbally expressed humour, Gilmore Girls, Grice's conversational maxims, humour in communication			

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## 1. Introduction

### 1.1 Aims and structure

John Morreall explains in *Taking Laughter Seriously* how the study of humour and laughter has been seen as less important, frivolous in fact, in the academic circles until a few years before the publication of his book in 1983 (ix). Nowadays, humour has become a widely accepted field of study – there is, for example, an international journal of humour research, *HUMOR*. The evolution of popular culture as a subject of study has been relatively similar. As Ritch Calvin points out,

although certain segments of academia, and certain academics, still contend that popular culture in general, and television in particular, is beneath scrutiny, [...] a significant portion of the academic world understands and believes that television is not only a worthy field of inquiry, but a necessary one at that. (3)

Television, Calvin says, "is the entertainment of the masses, just as storytellers, plays, and serialized fiction were in the past" (3).

Being a typical child of the 1980's and 1990's, I have grown up watching television and going to the movies. Reading and going to the theatre and opera are highly regarded in my family, as well, but for me, high culture is not the only form of culture. Therefore, choosing a television series to be studied in this thesis was only natural. Secondly, having started my university studies in a translation department, pragmatics has for long been one of my key interests. Thirdly, one of my favourite past times has been spotting and deciphering jokes that cannot be translated – not to mention my fascination to witty humour whether it is translatable or not. Combining all of these, the object of study for this

thesis was relatively simple to choose: humour in the witty American television series, *Gilmore Girls*.

This thesis concentrates on verbally expressed humour in the series *Gilmore Girls*. Although the series, which is best categorized by as belonging to the hybrid genre of comedy drama, uses both verbally and non-verbally expressed humour, the latter will be disregarded. It must be pointed out, though, that research on verbally expressed humour has mostly been interested in its semantics. This thesis, however, is more interested in its pragmatics, and therefore the theories used in the thesis are not the theories of verbally expressed humour specifically, but the general theories of humour supplemented with linguistic pragmatics. The aims of this thesis are, firstly, to study how verbally expressed humour is used in *Gilmore Girls*, secondly, to study how different forms of humour have been utilized and, thirdly, to discuss the ways in which Grice's conversational maxims can be flouted and violated for comic effect.

The thesis is divided into three parts: the first part discusses theories of humour, the second part the mechanisms of verbally expressed humour, and the third part is an analysis of humour in *Gilmore Girls*. The first part of the analysis concentrates how humour is used in the series to, for example, define characters and interpersonal relationships. The second part of the analysis deals with the various of forms of humour that have been used in the series and the third part concentrates on the pragmatics of the humour used in the series by examining Grice's conversational maxims and the Cooperative Principle in the humorous discourse between the characters.

## 1.2. Defining verbal humour, verbally expressed humour and word play

Before turning the focus to the theories of humour, it is necessary to explain the terms used in this thesis briefly, and to motivate why they have been chosen.

The two most common terms are verbal humour and verbally expressed or *verbalized* humour (VEH). VEH is defined as "a general term for any humorous item, such as a joke, which is conveyed in written or spoken form, as opposed to a joke conveyed in some other medium, such as visually" (Ritchie 224). Contrastively, verbal humour is inherently concerned with verbal matters: it relies on particular properties of language, which VEH need not do (Ritchie 13, 224). The resistance of verbal humour to direct translation is occasionally given as a further explanation on the differences of the two (see, e.g., Attardo 1994, 95–96; Ritchie, 13). Although the distinction to be made between verbal humour and VEH is relatively simple, the former, as Graeme Ritchie points out, is occasionally used to mean the latter (13), as for example Attardo and Morreall seem to do. This can be confusing since verbal humour is much narrower a term than verbally expressed humour. It must be pointed out, however, that there seems to be plenty of "room to play with" concerning VEH, as Ritchie is not interested in explaining in detail what the term refers to. Alexander, on the other hand, gives a relatively exhaustive list of ways of forming verbal humour. Arguably, he has an easier task, since verbal humour is the more restricted term of the two.

Delia Chiaro uses the term word play to address phenomena similar to verbally expressed humour. In Chiaro's terminology, word play "includes every conceivable way in which language is used with the intent to amuse" (1–2). Chiaro's terminology is occasionally used in this thesis, and it is therefore important to remember that her notion of

word play is a larger term than the word play in everyday language. The researchers of humour in general are mostly interested in jokes and puns, which this thesis considers less important. As the text to be studied in this thesis is not a conventional comedy, nor a situation comedy, the simple form of the joke seems insufficient. Therefore, the terms verbally expressed humour (VEH) and verbalized humour are used in this thesis.

## 2 Theory

This section forms a basis for my analysis of the verbally expressed humour in *Gilmore Girls* and the non-observance of conversational rules, which can result in humorous dialogue. I will start by discussing the concept of the comic, and then discuss the theories of humour. Thirdly, the idea of verbally expressed humour is discussed and fourthly, the pragmatic side of humour, that is, the conversational rules by H. Paul Grice are introduced. The last part of this section seeks to provide an overview of humour research in the field of popular culture.

### 2.1 The Comic

Seppo Knuuttila discusses the relation between humour and the comic in his study *Kansanhuumorin mieli: kaskut maailmankuvan aineksena*, where he emphasises the internal nature of humour and the external nature of the comic. Humour is a "state of mind" or an intake on life and, more precisely, a point of view on the comic (95). The comic, on the other hand, can be produced: it may be found in shapes, postures, gestures, movements, actions, situations, and speech etc. (Laurila 285–286, Knuuttila 95). According to Kinnunen, it is possible to produce a comical event whenever and wherever (200). Nevertheless, both humour and the comic are objective phenomena and they can therefore be both observed and analyzed (Kinnunen 200–201), provided that certain prerequisites



are fulfilled (see Knuuttila 95). Despite the fact that it is, according to Knuuttila, possible – and also important – to regard humour and the comic as separate phenomena, they are nonetheless in close interaction with each other: the comic is a catalyst for humour, and humour makes the comic either accepted or rejected (95).

Steve Neale and Frank Krutnik offer a different view on the concept of the comic, namely that of Sigmund Freud's. He distinguishes between the joke and the comic where the former is "*made* (constructed, produced); it exists only in utterance; and its material is language and signs" (72; emphasis original) and the latter is *witnessed* (discovered, observed) and can exist "beyond the realms of formal utterances, in situations encountered in everyday life" (72; emphasis original). Knuuttila's definition of the comic seems to encompass both the joke and the comic, and it is the definition which I will use as my basis.

It needs to be stressed that the relationship of the concept of laughter to those of humour and the comic is problematic, since, in addition to expressing pleasure and delight and thus humour and the comic, it may also occur for neurophysiologic reasons only (Knuuttila 95). La Fave et al. have put this in a somewhat poetic way: "Humour lies neither in laughter nor in jokes but only in the minds of men" (83). This should be kept in mind when reading this thesis. Indeed, although the basic supposition of humour and the comic is laughter, this is not always the case. Neale and Krutnik agree: "as we all know, specific instances of the comic do not always engender laughter" (64). They talk about cues that help, for example, the spectator of a comedy to interpret it as funny, but the hearers do not always laugh at instances cued as humorous: the cue might be missed or humour might be

located where it was not intended (Neale and Krutnik 64–65). Funniness, therefore, is not a property of utterances themselves, but a property of circumstances (Neale and Krutnik 65), that is, humour is context-bound. Moreover, sometimes a mere reference to the comic is enough to engender laughter, as for example between a group of good friends (Knuuttila 114).

## 2.2. Theories of humour

Theories of humour can be divided into three branches: theories of incongruity, theories of superiority, and theories of release or relief (see Morreall, *Taking Laughter Seriously*). This tripartite classification is perhaps the most common, but by no means the only one. For example, Attardo gives a similar kind of clustering in *Linguistic Theories of Humour*, as he divides theories to cognitive (incongruity and contrast), social (hostility, aggression, superiority, triumph, derision, disparagement), and psychoanalytical (release, sublimation, liberation, economy) theories (47). Ritchie discusses other, non-tripartite, classifications such as Wilson's and Keith-Speigel's, but points out that even those could "plausibly be mapped on to three broader categories" (7). However, as he mentions, "the existence of these varied taxonomies emphasizes the lack of consensus not only about what the theory should be but also about exactly what existing theories say and how they differ" (7).

Although it is important to give an idea of the various theories of humour, I will concentrate on the most common tripartite classification. Furthermore, while I will discuss the theories of incongruity and superiority in more detail, as they are useful to this study, relief is given relatively little attention as it is somewhat impractical from the point of view of this study.

### 2.2.1. Discussing theories of humour

The superiority theory is the oldest – and perhaps the most widespread – of the three, since it was held by Plato and Aristotle, and in the early modern period by Thomas Hobbes (Morreall, *Taking Laughter Seriously*, 4–5). According to this theory, people laugh from feelings of superiority over other people, or over their own former position (Morreall, *The Philosophy of Laughter and Humor*, 5). Despite being a very negative view on laughter and humour, superiority theory dominated the philosophical tradition until the eighteenth century (Morreall, *The Philosophy of Laughter and Humor*, 3; Critchley 3). Superiority theory gives explanation to why one would laugh in derision or at somebody else's misfortune. Although laughing in derision might be culturally undesirable, normative and factual questions should not be confused – "people often laugh at the misfortunes of others, and seem to have done so throughout recorded history" (Morreall, *Taking Laughter Seriously*, 8). In fact, Morreall points out that "laugh of derision [...] is found several times in the Iliad [...] and is almost the only kind of laughter found in the Bible" (*Taking Laughter Seriously*, 9).

The relief theory, on the other hand, treats laughter as the venting of pent-up nervous energy (Morreall, *The Philosophy of Laughter and Humor*, 6). The theory emerged in the nineteenth century in the work of Herbert Spencer (Critchley 6). However, the best known version is that of Sigmund Freud's complex theory, published in 1905, that distinguishes three kinds of laughter situations which Freud calls "jokes", "the comic", and "humour"

(Morreall, *The Philosophy of Laughter and Humor*, 131). The theory is simplified by Simon Critchley, who summarizes it by saying that "the energy that is relieved and discharged in laughter provides pleasure because it allegedly economizes upon energy that would ordinarily be used to contain or repress psychic activity" (Critchley 3). Although the relief theory has its place in the humour research, I will not discuss it at more length but will move on to discuss incongruity theory.

While superiority focuses on the emotional or feeling side of laughter, incongruity focuses on the cognitive or thinking side (Morreall, *Taking Laughter Seriously*, 15). According to Chapman and Foot, "incongruity is usually defined as a conflict between what is expected and what actually occurs in the joke" (12). For the incongruity theory, on the other hand, "amusement is an intellectual reaction to something that is unexpected, illogical, or inappropriate in some other way" (Morreall, *Taking Laughter Seriously*, 15). Morreall continues:

The basic idea behind the incongruity theory is very general and quite simple. We live in an orderly world, where we have come to expect certain patterns among things, their properties, events, etc. We laugh when we experience something that doesn't fit into these patterns. (15–16)

Although the incongruity theory was first "hinted at" by Aristotle and "incongruity-based" issues already discussed in the Renaissance, the theory was not worked out in detail before the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries (Morreall, *Taking Laughter Seriously*, 16; Attardo *Linguistic Theories of Humour*, 48). Morreall suggests that the most famous proponents of the theory were Immanuel Kant and Arthur Schopenhauer, though Kant's theory was not simply an incongruity theory but a theory of relief as well (*Taking Laughter Seriously*, 16).

Although I will rely on incongruity theory to a great extent, it is not without its faults. John Morreall points out in *Taking Laughter Seriously* that as long as only humorous laughter is considered, the theory works well, but the weakness of the theory is that it is not comprehensive enough to explain all cases of laughter (18). Although there are many instances of non-humorous laughter, which do not involve incongruity, Morreall does not discard the theory altogether, but appeals to it as part of the mechanism for all humour (18).

All in all, Morreall is critical of all the three theories, and argues that every version of the abovementioned theories fails to give a comprehensive account for all cases of laughter (*Taking Laughter Seriously*, 38). On the other hand, Graeme Ritchie points out that there are varied discussions of humour that do not all consider the same aspect of humour, which opens the possibility that several of the theories (or their proposals) could simultaneously be true (7). Yet, as Ritchie points out, most of the newly introduced theories aiming to criticize the old theories have serious shortcomings themselves (1). According to Ritchie, there are many "interesting informal discussions" at best, which claim to be theories or models, but often fail to "define their basic terms formally, and are insufficiently developed to make precise falsifiable predictions" (1). Despite the shortcomings of the respective theories, I have chosen to base my thesis on incongruity and superiority theories.

### 2.2.3 Bisociation, incongruity and superiority

As incongruity and superiority are the main targets of my interest, I will continue discussing them further. For example, incongruity theory can also be discussed in terms of Koestler's idea of bisociation, through which one concept is viewed from two perspectives (Ritchie 220). Therefore, before concentrating in detail on incongruity and superiority, the idea of *bisociation* is introduced shortly.

Bisociation or "bisociativity", means the "specific, conceptually 'two-planed' nature of *any* creative art" (Krikmann 28; emphasis added), not just humour. Krikmann continues: "In the case of humour, it means comic collision of or oscillation between two frames or reference ~ worlds of discourse ~ codes ~ associative contexts, in the case of scientific discovery – objective analogy, in the case of art – the image" (28).

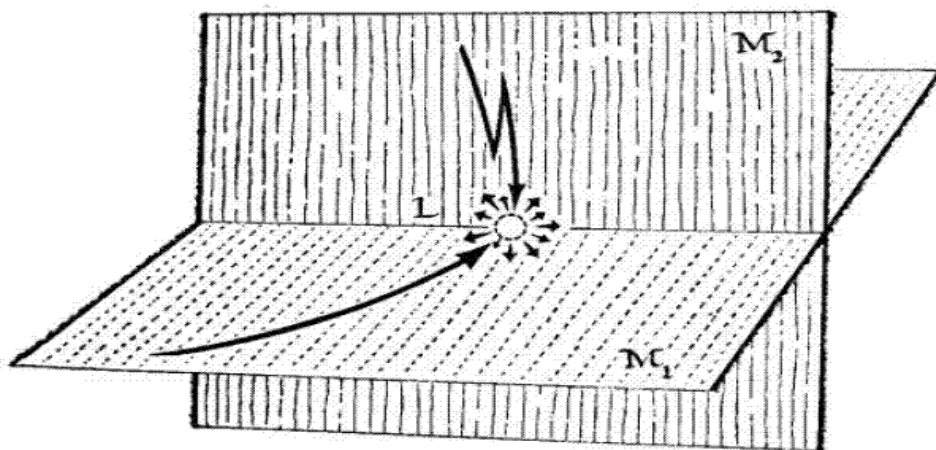


Figure 1. Koestler's depiction of bisociation. (Krikmann 29)

Bisociation works on two different levels, as does, for example, a metaphor. In Figure 1, M1 and M2 are two independent, often conflicting frames of reference. Event L, in the intersection of these frames of reference, thus refers bisociatively to two contexts, (cf. associatively referring to just one frame of reference) (Knuuttila 119). A comic impression is based on perceiving such events L.

A simplified explanation of the comic is given by Neale and Krutnik: "All instances of the comic involve a departure from a norm, whether the norm be one of action, appropriate behaviour, conventional dress, or stereotypical features" (67). This idea is what underlies the incongruity model. According to its key principle, impression of the comic is caused by incongruity between two planes, a collision of two frames of reference (also called schemas or scripts) (Knuuttila 112) – in other words, by bisociation.

Morreall points out in *Taking Laughter Seriously* that it is possible that a child laughs when encountering a new thing or event, because it cannot assimilate it into any familiar conceptual category (60). However, he also points out that most adult humour "is based on incongruity and not on simple surprise" (*Taking Laughter Seriously*, 60). Morreall continues:

Perhaps the most important thing to note about incongruity is that a thing or event is not incongruous *simpliciter*, but only relative to someone's conceptual scheme. Incongruity is a violation of a pattern in someone's picture of how things should be. What any individual finds incongruous will depend on what his experience has been and what his expectations are. (*Taking Laughter Seriously*, 60–61)

Therefore, one might argue, that if the recipient expects a certain kind of incongruity, encountering such incongruity will not be humorous to him/her. It is necessary to point out that incongruity alone is argued to be insufficient in creating humour but that the

incongruity must be resolved (for discussion see Ritchie 54–58). Yet, the resolution of incongruity alone is not sufficient for engendering humour, either (Ritchie 57). The discussion concerning the resolution of incongruity is important to mention, but as it is such a large field it will not be discussed in more detail in this thesis.

Yet another concept closely related to incongruity and the comic is that of *surprise*. However, Knuuttila points out that a surprising turn of events is neither a condition for the comic nor a guarantee for it (118). Neale and Krutnik, discussing verisimilitude, quote Jerry Palmer's idea that there are two principal sources of comic surprise. The first is the sudden contradiction of expectations that is founded in the narrative itself. The second form of contradiction regards the audience and their ordinary everyday experience, meaning the contradiction of knowledge, values, or expectations about the outside world (Neale and Krutnik 83).

Surprise involves withholding knowledge, whereas *comic suspense* involves the giving of knowledge (Neale and Krutnik 33). The knowledge given is nevertheless always partial – the spectator may know what is going to happen but not when, or s/he is oblivious to the outcome and in a state of ignorance and curiosity (Neale and Krutnik 33–34). Neale and Krutnik point out that in the case of suspense and surprise in a narrative, the one being surprised may be either the spectator or the character. The spectator may know what is going on, but not the character, and vice versa. Neale and Krutnik mention, however, that suspense can "arise on the basis of the system of motivation governing the chain of events" (40), and it may not necessarily involve explicit information. A further point is made of the relationship between surprise and suspense, namely that "however much a comedy may involve or depend upon suspense, it will usually at some point also involve surprise" (Neale and Krutnik 40).



*Superiority* has also to do with incongruity. Koestler's concept of bisociation includes the idea that the emotional mood corresponding to the creation of humour is aggressive (Krikmann 28), which is not really the case with the large field of humour, but is nevertheless in accordance with some aspects of the superiority theory. However, not all acts of aggression count as humour. As Alison Ross points out, there has to be some kind of incongruity in the language used in order for it to count as humour rather than as a mere insult (54). Yet, as she reminds,

Some instances of humour that attacks a target can be seen as cruel mockery of an already oppressed group by the insecure, but there is a long history of satire where the follies of those in power are exposed. There is also humour which makes a wry comment about the teller or human weaknesses in general. (53–54)

As an isolated example, the former President of the United States, George W. Bush, held one of the world's most influential positions, but at the same time, he was commonly the butt of malicious jokes – to such an extent that probably nobody before him has ever been. On the other hand, when considering humour about the teller and/or human weaknesses, it is safe to say that stand-up comedians have tapped into this particular never-ending source of humour better than anyone.

It is tempting to simplify incongruity into meaning only novelty and the surprise generated by the new. This, however, is not the case, as incongruity can also be found in the conventional. For example, according to Maurice Charney, comedy is, by natural impulse, "conventional, firmly anchored in type characters and stock situations" (49). He continues:

This is not to say that comedy doesn't seek out originality and even wildness, but only that originality and wildness are produced by the handling of the comic materials rather by the materials themselves. This may be a quibble, since ends and means, form and content tend to merge and become indistinguishable, but comedy retains its traditional character even when it seems most novel and eccentric. (49)

Although by *comedy* Charney refers to theatrical plays, this arguably is the case with television comedy, as well. The "type characters" and "stock situations" have most likely changed somewhat during the years and the change from the scene to the screen but they certainly exist. By comparison, a real-life event of a person accidentally missing the chair when trying to sit down is by no means a novelty, but in the situation where it is incongruous, it can engender laughter and amusement.

As Charney points, comedy is conventional in nature. According to the 4<sup>th</sup> century rhetorician and grammarian Evanthius, a narrative comedy traditionally consists (or should consist) of such components as a *protasis* (exposition), an *epitasis* (complication) and a *catastrophe* (resolution) (qtd in Neale and Krutnik 27). Another element, called *catastasis*, or further complication, was proposed during the Renaissance as an additional element after epitasis (Neale and Krutnik 27). This convention is still widely used in both theatrical and television comedies.

When it comes to the characters in comedies, Charney suggests that "comedy deals in stereotypes rather than fully rounded, three-dimensional, living characters" (50). He states that "it is possible for those who deal in stereotypes to break loose from their moorings and to engage in fresh appraisals, but the latter is counterpointed against the former" (51). For example, "great comic characters like Falstaff are both highly original and highly traditional, depending upon what aspect of character we choose to consider, but

the originality is especially striking because of [...] the basis in convention" (Charney, 51). There is no point in arguing against Charney, as his points seem more or less valid. Indeed, Morreall mentions that only for children, simple surprise alone is sufficient in engendering laughter but for adults, there must be incongruity (*Taking Laughter Seriously*, 60). Conventions and norms are essential in creating incongruity, one way or another.

In relation to superiority, Ross discusses one "character" type in particular, namely the butt of humour, the object of ridicule: "In many examples of humour, the butt is a representative of a group perceived as inferior in some sense, so it might seem unnecessary to create a sense of superiority over them. The butt must first be accorded some power. Certain social groups can be perceived as threat, if not in any physical or economic sense, then because they shake the other's sense of security in themselves" (55). The butt of the humour can be either weaker than the speaker or more powerful than the speaker. Considering the first case, Delia Chiaro explains the following: "most western societies possess a dim-witted underdog who is the butt of a whole subcategory of derogatory jokes which possibly allow their recipients to give vent to equally repressed feelings of superiority" (7), such as Irishmen in England, Belgians in France, and Poles in the United States (Chiaro 7).

Keeping in mind what Ross has claimed about the butt of humour, it is clear that the butt may have power naturally or they can be accorded that power first. In modern television comedy, it seems to be a rule that characters with natural power (by profession, by appearance, or for other reasons) are ridiculed. The same applies, more or less, to the characters on the other end of the scale. Various television comedies include both powerful and weak characters whose purpose is to function as an object of ridicule, at least more often than the others, the more "normal" characters. Consider, for example the following

characters: David Brent in *The Office*, Chastity Claire "C.C." Babcock in *The Nanny* (from Fran's and Niles's point of view), and Mr Burns in *The Simpsons*, as opposed to the weak characters such as Joey in *Friends*, Yetta Rosenberg in *The Nanny*, and Kramer in *Seinfeld*. The act of ridicule on all of these characters' part might come from the other characters in the show, or they might be portrayed as ridiculous on a more general level.

Much of verbally expressed humour is based on incongruity, and therefore the final point concerning incongruity is verbally expressed humour as constructing the comic. Although it is important to bear in mind what has been said about the surprising turn, namely, that it is neither a condition nor a guarantee for the comic, the surprising turn is nevertheless the most basic convention of verbally expressed humour. Ritchie divides the incongruity found in verbally expressed humour to static and dynamic forms (50). The incongruous effect in static incongruity, he explains, "may be dependent upon the vocabulary or phrasing used, since that may contribute to the sense of oddity, absurdity, or uncommonness, but there is no contribution from the passage of time in the describing of revealing of the scene" (50). In dynamic verbally expressed incongruity, on the other hand, "the effect is created [...] by the temporal sequence and manner in which the scene is described or revealed, with earlier stages or the text establishing expectation to be violated or tensions to be released" (50).

This thesis discusses verbally expressed humour in a scripted television program. It is important to understand the theories behind the humour, since especially incongruity and superiority are, as mentioned, frequently applied in (television) comedies in a variety of ways. In order to discuss verbally expressed humour, however, it is necessary to first take a look at different forms it may take.

### 2.3. Forms of verbally expressed humour

Humour is often studied from a semantic point of view. This thesis, however, concentrates on, firstly, interaction through humour and, secondly, the pragmatics of humour. Therefore, the general theories of humour – supplemented with linguistic pragmatics – are in use as opposed to theories concerning verbally expressed humour alone.<sup>1</sup>

A great deal of commentary on verbally expressed humour seems to rely on the division that joking is either a way of playing with language or that it has nothing to do with language as a system. However, Chiaro argues that "any joke, whether it contains a pun or not, by the very nature of its verbalization, necessarily plays on language. It may not be an ambiguous item which acts as its focal point; it could be its delivery, the intonation or the accent in which it is delivered, or even non-verbal additions such as gesture or mime" (15). Since this thesis is less interested in finding a narrow explanation on humour and more about the various ways in which humour may be constructed verbally, Chiaro's view is an important one.

This section concentrates on the ways in which verbally expressed humour may be constructed – although one such frame has been left out entirely, namely riddle. Although the majority of discussion on verbally expressed humour relies on jokes and leaves out the

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<sup>1</sup> The two most commonly applied theories of verbally expressed humour are Victor Raskin's Script-Based Semantic Theory of Humour (SSTH), and Raskin's and Salvatore Attardo's General Theory of Verbal Humour (GTVH). These two theories rely heavily on fictional jokes, which Morreall says to be "to humor research what fruit flies are to genetics" ("Verbal Humor Without Switching Scripts and Without Non *Bona-fide* Communication", 394). The SSTH examines the underlying scripts or "structured configuration of knowledge about some situation or activity" of the joke (Ritchie 70). The initial part of the joke has two possible interpretations, so two scripts can be associated with it, and the final part of the joke draws the more unusual script to the hearer's notice in a surprising way, thus engendering humour (Ritchie 70). The GTVH, according to Ritchie, is a development of the SSTH (70). The GTVH deals with six hierarchical "knowledge resources" (script opposition, logical mechanism, situation, target, narrative strategy, and language) that jokes are thought to consist of (Ritchie 70–71). The SSTH/GTVH are concerned with the detailed strategies of jokes, whereas this thesis is interested in humour in general, not only jokes. Moreover, this thesis is only partly interested in how humour is constructed and more interested in to which purposes it is used.

rest, there are various ways in which this question may be examined. Ultimately, nearly every instance of verbally expressed humour may be reduced into a joke or a pun. From the point of view of the analysis of this thesis, such a division is nevertheless highly unsatisfactory, as the aim is to explain the use of humour in a television series, not to discuss the formation of the jokes at a morphological, phonological, syntactic or other linguistic level at length.

### 2.3.1. Joke

When discussing verbally expressed humour, it is impossible to ignore jokes. In fact, it sometimes it seems that every humorous verbal event may be dubbed a joke. Nevertheless, in humour research, a joke usually means a conventional joke, with some kind of a clear structure, whether it be a one-liner or a more dialogically set up structure.

Attardo mentions in *Humorous Texts: A Semantic and Pragmatic Analysis* that the prominence of jokes in the linguistics of humour is a result of the fact that they are typically short, easy to collect, and simple (they tend to have only one source of humour) (61). Short and simple or not, in *Humorous Texts: A Semantic and Pragmatic Analysis* Attardo divides jokes into narrative (or canned) jokes and conversational jokes, and these two groups have distinguishing features when compared to each other (6). According to Attardo in *Humorous Texts: A Semantic and Pragmatic Analysis*, canned jokes are

- typically told by a narrator who often prefaces the joke with an announcement or the humorous nature of the forthcoming turn, the narrator also holds the floor through the telling and releases it for the reaction turn of the audience

- "rehearsed", in the sense that they have been heard or created by the narrator *before* the telling [original emphasis]
- detached from the context in which they are told. (61–62)

Conversational jokes, on the other hand, are told in regular turn-taking in conversation, and do not include prefacing (62). They are also created by the teller "on the fly", in addition to being strongly context-dependent (62).

Barry Blake reminds that there are no rules to be followed, when it comes to humour (3). Nevertheless, there are recurrent properties and principles of jokes, the overriding principle being that there should be a set-up and a punch (Blake 3). The punch is often dubbed a punch line, although Blake points out that "the bit that makes the impact is not always a line" (3). Yet, the most common task of a punch (line) is that it acts as disrupting elements. Attardo explains: "while the setup part of the text establishes a given script, the occurrence of a disjunctive (punch line) forces the reader to switch to a second script" (*Humorous Texts: A Semantic and Pragmatic Analysis*, 83). Essentially, as Attardo claims, the scripts are non-congruous, which forces the recipient to backtrack and reinterpret the text, and form a new interpretation of the text (83).

### 2.3.2. Pun

Ritchie calls puns one of the simplest forms of jokes (108). He suggests that puns are a very widespread and commonplace form of spontaneous humour, at least within the English-speaking culture, although not all puns are funny (108). In fact, he points out that there is "even a widely established habit of groaning in response to a pun rather than

laughing" (108). Nevertheless, as the aim is not to consider what is considered humour but what is intended as humour, it is best to continue on with a definition of puns.

Neal R. Norrick uses a definition roughly matching that of Sacks, saying that

The punster constructs an ambivalent utterance with one meaning oriented toward understanding the preceding utterance and a second meaning also fitted to that utterance but based on a contextually inappropriate analysis of it [...]. The punning turn consequently clashes with the topic and/or tenor of current conversation, while some linguistic element establishes its claim to a rather tenuous formal relevance.

(61)

Ambiguity, therefore, is a convention of punning, but as Attardo points out, not every ambiguous word constitutes a pun (1994, 133). The pun has to have a context to build upon, and be opposed to (Attardo, *Linguistic Theories of Humour* 133). Alexander understands puns as covering wordplay depending on lexical ambiguity, which can "revolve around either phonological mechanisms (eg [sic] homophony) or semantic ones (eg polysemy [...])" (75). Ritchie divides puns into paradigmatic and syntagmatic puns (110). He explains that

In the paradigmatic variant a particular substring appears in the text, and the joke depends on the similarity (or even identity) of that string to some other string not in the text. A syntagmatic pun has two (or more) substrings actually in the text, whose similarity (or detail) is the basis of the pun. (108)

Perhaps the most easily explained categories of paradigmatic puns are punning riddles, such as "What did the python say to his victim? – I've got a crush on you" (Binsted, qtd in Ritchie 122) or malapropism, the (accidental) use of similar word compared to the appropriate one, for example, artichoke for architect (see Ritchie 116). Attardo admits in



*Linguistic Theories of Humour* that syntagmatic puns are more difficult to define, partly because "different and not entirely overlapping definitions have been proposed" (115). An example of a syntagmatic pun is "It's better to be looked over than to be overlooked" (Mae West, qtd in Ritchie 127).

### 2.3.3. Register humour and saying things funny

Maurice Charney suggests that the way in which society in comedies is "conveniently divided into three major categories" (51), that is, high, middle, and low, also affects the way the characters in the comedy speak. Although the absolute rigidity of the society in modern television comedy is debatable, Charney's point is more or less valid – while the high characters speak in high style, the middle level (the "normal, everyday") characters speak in a middle variety lacking personality and variety (51) in television comedies, as well. Attempts to speak, or instances of speaking, in a different variety function as a source of the comic. This raises the issue of register humour.

According to Salvatore Attardo, the concept of register humour is problematic (*Linguistic Theories of Humour*, 230–241). In general, register humour is the use of "incongruent elements in a situation" (236) and it is the mechanisms of connotation that are at work here (252). In his discussion Attardo cites Catford's definition of register as being "a variety correlated with the performer's social role on a give occasion" (237). In this sense, the use of language which does not correlate with the performer's social role can generate humour. Nevertheless, Attardo problematises the role of register pointing out the difficulty in defining all registers and their multiple sub-registers (Motherese, Journalese, etc.) to a satisfying degree (230–241). Despite Attardo's plausible opinions, there is no

better term to describe the use of language in which the mere choice of synonym might be humorous, or that there is perhaps nothing humorous in what is said, but how it is said. The problem can be seen in other definitions as well, such as Morreall's "saying things funny" as opposed to "saying funny things" (*Taking Laughter Seriously*, 64). Morreall's notion is not taken much further than that a comedian is a person who says funny things and a comic a person who says things funny, but the idea is still valid: what is said need not always be humorous, it is enough that the way in which it is said, is.

#### 2.3.4. Satire, parody, irony and sarcasm

It has already been stated that much of humour research concentrates on joke and punning as they are the easiest form to study. The same cannot be said of the use of parody, irony and sarcasm. Taken out of context, there might not be anything that would engender laughter. Similarly to register humour, the context reveals the humour, not the item. Nevertheless, these humorous genres form the core of this thesis.

*Satire* is most often used as a literary genre, but according to Blake, there can also be verbal satire (16). All in all, "satire aims to ridicule, to prick pretensions, to expose hypocrisy, to show that appearances can often be deceptive. Satire distorts and exaggerates" (Blake 16). To illustrate verbal satire, Blake uses an example from NBC's *The Tonight Show*, by Jay Leno:

Now there are reports from Baghdad that officials are taking bribes for favors, giving jobs to their relatives, taking money under the table from contractors. You know what this means? The war is less than a week old, and already they have an American-style democracy. (17)

This is a good example of satire on two accounts, as it both exaggerates the extent of corruption in America, and therefore is a prick towards those in power (Blake 16).

Blake calls *parody* a form of satire while Neale and Krutnik warn about confusing them (Blake 17, Neale and Krutnik 19). Neale and Krutnik explain the difference in the following way: "Satire is often confused with parody, but the two are quite different. Where parody [...] draws on – and highlights – aesthetic conventions, satire draws on – and highlights – social ones" (19). One reason for the confusion between satire and parody is that parody may be used for satirical purposes (Neale and Krutnik 20).

Usually one parodies genres or "any form of artistic expression, whether it be literary [...] or other forms such as paintings, ballet, music, especially opera and songs generally" (Blake 17), but it is also common to parody something on a smaller scale. It is best to keep in mind, however, that parody need not always be humorous (Neale and Krutnik 18). Nevertheless, as Ross says, what is important about parody is that it cannot be appreciated without reference to the context, as "parody uses signals, which can only be recognized by an audience familiar with the original" (49).

*Irony* and *sarcasm* are best explained together, as their relationship can be quite problematic. The first problem is that in some cases, one is used to explain the other. The other problem is that there are opposite views on what constitutes irony and what sarcasm. For example, Barry Blake's definition of irony remains closely related to literature and drama. Blake holds a relatively narrow view on irony, mainly that it means "incongruity between the innocence or ignorance of a participant and the knowledge of the author and audience" (19), or someone unwittingly revealing the very fault they are accused of, be it always answering with a question or something else (18–19). The most common use of irony by the general public, however, is to refer to twists of fate in everyday life, that is, to

what Claire Colebrook calls cosmic irony (14). There is also the literary concept of tragic irony, of which one example is a play where the audience knows what is going to happen before the character (Colebrook 14). This is close to, though not entirely the same, what Blake means with his definition. Nevertheless, in a sense often held by researchers in the field of pragmatics at least, the term irony is understood to emerge when the meaning of an utterance is opposite to what has been said.

Sarcasm, according to Blake, "usually involves someone saying something that is the opposite of what is appropriate, often in a derisive or mocking tone" (21, emphasis added), such as "don't spend it all at once" when one is given a pitiful sum of money (21). In order to distinguish irony from sarcasm in this thesis, I will simplify the distinction: irony can be seen as a comment opposite to what is meant, and sarcasm as a mocking remark in the similar nature. Geoffrey N. Leech comments that "The ironic force of a remark is often signalled by exaggeration or understatement, which makes it difficult for [the hearer] to interpret the remark at its face value" (143). When considering irony, this might very well be the case. However, Leech speaks solely about irony, which is quite problematic if his views are to be extended to sarcasm – mainly because misinterpretation of a sarcastic comment is quite easy. In fact, Blake points out that sarcasm can quite easily misfire in the sense that it is taken at face value, (21).

As irony and sarcasm are often intertwined, it is no wonder the term sarcastic irony is in use. This is covertly explained by Jorgensen as meaning a form of irony that is used to "express disapproval, criticism, complaints, contempt etc" (616), which is close to the definition of sarcasm given earlier in this thesis. As an interesting point, Jorgensen suggests that "sarcasm is not a very effective vehicle for communication" (619) and points out that "although the ironic form is well-suited for sarcasm, studies to date do not explain

why it would be chosen by speakers who could couch their criticism in some other [...] way" (614). Therefore, her study on sarcastic irony in face-saving function in American discourse is an interesting one, albeit beyond the scope of this thesis.

### 2.3.5. Banter

According to Blake, banter "involves the exchange of word play with a teasing or provoking element" (Blake 72). Neal R. Norrick explains banter through an example as "rapid exchange of humorous lines oriented toward a common theme, though aimed primarily at mutual entertainment rather than topical talk" (29). The common feature in both definitions is that banter is slightly negative in tone. Banter might easily be thought to be about mocking or teasing the other, but it may also be aimed more at oneself, as well, or at mutual "cause".

It must be pointed out that the distinction of banter, irony and sarcasm may not always be clear, because the speaker may use irony and sarcasm in banter (see Norrick 30). In fact, some cases of banter may consist merely of ironic or sarcastic comments. However, according to Norrick banter may also include word play in the usual sense of "punning, extended metaphor and so on" (30). This is the case in Norrick's example below.

LYDIA:	We had such a nice day today, so you hurry and get rested. Because you're gonna have a big nice [day tomorrow].
BRANDON:	[Hurry and get] rested
NED:	Uhhuhhuhhuhhuhhuh hehe.
BRANDON:	That's oxymoronic.

NED: Uhhuhhuhhuh. Yeah. Can you imagine the ox? Hehehe

BRANDON: No. But I've spotted the moron.

NED: I see. Huhhuhhuh. You'd think as dumb as oxes are. To call one a moron would be tautological. Huhhahaheh. (30)

Norrick mentions that in this particular example where two brothers are engaged in a discussion, word play itself has "become the primary cohesive element in a conversation" (30), as there is little else cohesion in the dialogue. The notion of word play becoming the primary cohesive element is an important one, as "complex verbal fireworks" (Norrick 30) may also occur in instances, where the main mechanism is not banter, but, for example, joking in a more neutral style.

Geoffrey N. Leech, on the other hand, describes banter from the point of view of politeness and suggests a "Banter Principle", which he expresses as follows: "In order to show solidarity with *h*, say something which is (i) obviously untrue and (ii) obviously impolite to *h*" (144). He explains that the implicature derived from the Banter Principle is "What *s* says is impolite to *h* and is clearly untrue. Therefore what *s* really means is polite to *h* and true" (144). The problem here is that whereas the principle alone might be relatively well applicable to a variety of cases of banter, the implicature cannot be taken as an underlying idea behind all banter, since it suggests that banter operates on gradable antonyms. For example, Norrick's example does not really work on gradable phenomena as bantering someone by calling them a moron does not result in actually calling them wise, either, but "not stupid" at best. Fortunately, Leech's own examples are similarly non-gradable, which shows that the notion of implicature is less meaningful in trying to explain banter.

### 2.3.6. Allusions

Similar to parody, which may be both humorous and humourless, allusions may also be used in comic effect, although they may occur for purposes of literary "snobbery" as well. According to Preminger, an allusion is a tacit reference to another literary work, to another art, to history, to contemporary figures, or the like (qtd in Leppihalme 7). When discussing allusions it is customary to speak of source texts, subtexts, or evoked texts, although it is quite clear from the definition of allusions that the evoked text may not be a text of any kind at all. Nevertheless, according to Alison Ross,

Allusions in humour involve extra-linguistic knowledge, in other words knowledge about the world. The double meaning may involve reference to a saying or quotation. If the listener does not share the same awareness of this, the ambiguity cannot be recognized. (11)

What this entails is that if an allusion is made in a humorous intention, in a conversation, for example, the evoked text should be recognized and the full implication of that allusion understood instantaneously in order for the allusion to be successful.

### 2.3.7. Linguistic formation of word play

While this thesis concentrates more on the forms and pragmatic level of humour, the final part of this section looks briefly at a few mechanisms in which one can play with words. Blake (4–16) lists a variety of "sources" of verbal humour, which have been paraphrased in the following table. All the examples are from Blake, structural changes are sometimes made.

SOURCE	MECHANISM	EXAMPLE
Fun with words	homophony, polysemy, mispronunciation, misidentification, misuse of words and malapromisms	When the actress saw her first grey hairs, she thought she'd dye.  America is the land of opportunism.
Grammatical ambiguities	e.g. exploiting structural ambiguity	A) My mother made me a homosexual. B) If I sent her the wool, would she make me one too?
Transpositions	swapping words or parts of words around	It's not the men in your life that counts. It's the life in your men.
Mixing styles	e.g. mixing prestigious accent to a dialectal grammar, similar words that belong to different varieties	A) My father is the conductor of the London Symphony Orchestra. B) My father is a conductor too. A) Oh, where does he do his conducting? B) On the Hammersmith bus.
Language in context	ambiguity because of lack of context	Committee wants prostitutes to be taught new skills.
Dashing expectations	expectations of quantity, style, etc raised but the result is incongruous	Roses are red, violets are blue, I'm schizophrenic, and so am I.
Clever connections	a connection between two seemingly disparate phenomena or entities	[An ex-stripper, now an old woman, decides to streak around the premises of her old people's home in the raw.] As she flashes by, one elderly woman said to another, "What was that lady wearing?" The other replied, "I don't know, but it needs ironing".
Logic, or the lack thereof	also tautology, but overall failing logic	A) Would you like this pizza cut into six pieces or eight? B) Six, please. I couldn't eat eight.  Suicidal twin kills sister by mistake!

Table 1. Sources of verbally expressed humour as presented by Blake (4–16)



This is by no means an exhaustive list, but merely aims show that there are several sources of verbally expressed humour. Naturally, some of these may also occur by accident but they may also be consciously created for humorous effect.

## 2.4 Grice's Cooperative Principle and humour

As already mentioned, many researchers concentrate on the semantics of humour, and therefore the semantic theories have gained importance in humour research. This thesis, on the other hand, is more interested in the pragmatics of humour. The British language philosopher H. Paul Grice is among the best known researchers in the field of pragmatics and his ideas of Cooperative Principle and conversational maxims, introduced in the 1970's, are often cited in the numerous introductory works to the field. In this thesis, the aim is to explain how humour may be engendered by violating and flouting (or non-observance of) the maxims.

Grice explains some basic notions on communication as follows:

Our talk exchanges do not normally consist of a succession of disconnected remarks, and would not be rational if they did. They are characteristically, to some degree at least, cooperative efforts; and each participant recognizes in them, to some extent, a common purpose or set of purposes, or at least a mutually accepted direction. This purpose or direction may be fixed from the start [...], or it may evolve during the exchange; it may be fairly definite, or it may be so indefinite as to leave very considerable latitude to the participants (as in a casual conversation). But at each stage, *some* possible conversational moves would be excluded as conversationally unsuitable. (26; emphasis original)

This presupposition, that all discourse is cooperative in nature, is the basis of his Cooperative Principle, a "rough general principle" (Grice 26) which the participants of any conversation will be expected to observe. The principle is expressed as follows: "make your conversational contribution such as is required, at the stage at which it occurs, by the accepted purpose or direction of the talk exchange in which you are engaged" (Grice 26). The Cooperative Principle itself is "formed" by four categories, which in turn include subsequent supermaxims and maxims. However, much of the literature refers to the four *categories* as maxims (and the "maxims" and "supermaxims" only specify them). This is also the way I will refer to them later in this thesis. Do not make your contribution more informative than is required

The maxims are:

CATEGORY	SUPERMAXIMS	MAXIMS
Quality	try to make your contribution one that is true	1. do not say what you believe is false 2. do not say that for which you lack adequate evidence
Quantity		1. make your contribution as informative as is required 2. do not make your contribution more informative than is required
Relation	be relevant	
Manner	be perspicuous	1. avoid obscurity 2. avoid ambiguity 3. be brief 4. be orderly

Table 2. Conversational maxims (Grice 26-27).

As Levinson points out, the maxims specify what the participants of a discussion "have to do in order to converse in a maximally efficient, rational, co-operative way: they should speak sincerely, relevantly and clearly, while providing sufficient information"

(Levinson 102). Nevertheless, as Levinson continues, nobody speaks in such a manner the whole time (102). In addition, Attardo believes that "Grice's hypothesized speaker, totally committed to the truth and relevance of his/her utterances, is a useful abstraction, but should be considered only as such" (*Linguistic Theories of Humour*, 287). Yet, the point is not whether or not these rules are always observed but rather the contrast between the perfectly compliant (and ultimately uninteresting) way of speaking and the ways in which the rules may be bent.

Levinson calls the notion of conversational implicature one of the most important ideas in pragmatics (97). One of the important contributions of this notion is that it "provides some explicit account of how it is possible to mean (in some general sense) more than what is actually 'said'" (97), which, for example, semantics alone is unable to do. The conversational implicature becomes into play when the maxims are not observed. The first example of non-observance is flouting. Joan Cutting explains flouting as follows.

When speakers appear not to follow the maxims but expect hearers to appreciate the meaning implied [...] we say that they are "flouting" the maxims. [...] The speaker implies a function different from the literal meaning of form; when flouting a maxim, the speaker assumes that the hearer knows that their words should not be taken at face value and that they can infer implicit meaning. (37)

Such implicit meanings are conveyed in utterances such as, for example, "I think you would be happier in a larger – or a smaller – college" to an unsuitable applicant, etc. (Cutting 36). Naturally, not all instances of flouting the maxims are such serious examples of conveying a possibly hurtful message, but a simple cue may suffice, as for example "Do you find it's getting a bit chilly in here" but essentially meaning "I want to put the fire on" (Cutting 36). What is important here is the notion that while the maxims are not always

adhered to on a superficial level, the hearer will interpret what is said as conforming to the maxims on at least some level (Levinson 103). Thus, if the speaker flouts one maxim, the hearer may assume that s/he is still adhering to another one.

Practically any maxim can be flouted, usually in order to exploit it for communicative purposes (Levinson 109). For example, when flouting the maxim of quantity, the speaker seems to give too little or too much information (Cutting 37), as for example talking about more trivial things than what one would expect, and hopefully the recipient will understand the implication (Cutting 37). According to Grice, patent tautologies such as "Women are women" are extreme examples of flouting of this maxim (33).

The flouting of the maxim of quality, on the other hand, is more complex as the speaker may use a hyperbole or meiosis, metaphors or euphemisms or, thirdly, irony or banter (Cutting 37–38; Grice 34). Cutting counts sarcasm as a form of irony, and banter as expressing a negative sentiment while implying a positive one (38). Clearly, these are a further proof that the researchers do not agree on what the terms actually entail. Nevertheless, irony is a somewhat problematic way of flouting maxims, as their flouting is only revealed after the implicatures have been worked at, that is, when the recipient has understood the ironical meaning (Attardo, *Humorous Texts: A Semantic and Pragmatic Analysis*, 114).

The third possible maxim to be flouted is the maxim of manner. The "rules" of the maxim tell the speaker to be orderly and avoid obscurity or ambiguity, but when flouting the maxim of manner, that is exactly what the speaker will be – obscure or ambiguous (Cutting 39). This may serve different functions: for example, a parent might choose to

speak in a manner that is sufficiently obscure that the child in the room will not understand what is being said, but the other parent will.

The fourth, and final, maxim is the one that researchers disagree upon. The point of flouting the maxim of relation is that the speaker expects the recipient to imagine what has *not* been said, "and make the connection between their utterance and the preceding one(s)" (Cutting 39). Grice admits that instances of flouting the maxim of relation are rare, but gives an example of a pause and a topic change as a response to a topic the speaker does not want to discuss (35). According to Cutting, some researchers disagree with Grice, and she states that "whether we observe or flout maxims, our utterances will always be taken as relevant to the preceding co-text" (39). This is undoubtedly so, since even the case described by Grice, the first speaker will understand that the other one does not wish to discuss that topic and the first speaker, if s/he is polite, will not bring it up again.

There are other forms of non-observance of a maxim, such as infringing it, violating it or opting out (Cutting 41, Grice 30). According to Cutting, "a speaker infringing a maxim fails to observe a maxim because of their imperfect linguistic performance, be it because the speaker is a non-native speaker, a child, nervous, drunk, cognitively impaired or simply incapable of speaking clearly" (Cutting 41) – mainly, the speaker thinks s/he is observing the maxim. However, if a speaker opts out, s/he is fully aware that s/he is not cooperating, but does not want to appear uncooperative (Cutting 41). This might be the case in such situations, where the speaker cannot say anything because of ethical or legal reasons – doctors, policemen and other professions dealing with confidential information are basic examples of this (Cutting 41).

The final form of non-observance is the violation of maxims. Similarly to flouting the maxims, it is possible to violate all of them (again, the maxim of relation being problematic). The underlying aim is to deceive the recipient: "the speaker is fully aware the recipient will not know the truth and will only understand the surface meaning of the words" (Cutting 40). In fact, "the speaker deliberately supplies insufficient information, says something that is insincere, irrelevant or ambiguous, and the hearer wrongly assumes that they are cooperating" (40).

When violating the maxim of quantity, the speaker does not give a sufficient amount of information in order to prevent the recipient from knowing the full picture (Cutting 40). An example of this is given by Cutting in a form of a short dialogue, where the wife replies to inquiries about the price of a new dress by saying "less than the last one" – without actually saying how much less (40). Giving a false price, on the other hand, would be violating the maxim of quality, that is, lying (Cutting 40). Trying to change the subject altogether by distracting the recipient, would be violating the maxim of relation. Violating the maxim of manner, on the other hand, is similar to violating both the maxim of quantity and relation, as an answer such as "a tiny fraction of my salary, though probably a bigger fraction of the salary of the woman that sold it to me" hoping that this it would be taken as an answer (and the matter dropped) would constitute as violating the maxim of manner (Cutting 40).

Discussing the violation of maxims in the context of humour is relatively difficult, as there seems to be relatively little research on the non-observance of the maxims for comic effect. In addition, the prevalence of jokes as a case study is again visible in the studies that have been made. For example Attardo uses jokes as examples of violations of the maxims in *Linguistic Theories of Humor*. Attardo also discusses the non-observance of maxims and

offers different ways in which the non-observance of maxims may better be taken into consideration in linguistic theories. An important point is that the CP is still valid (humorous texts violating maxims are still cooperative), although modifications to Grice's original theory are necessary as it does not account for jokes as violations of maxims to a satisfying degree. Such modifications in Attardo's discussion include "a hierarchy of CP's" (286), ultimately meaning that the original CP may be violated because the speaker follows a different CP, a CP of humour (286–287). Unfortunately, this idea is, again, constructed on studying jokes which make it hard to apply to this thesis. Thus, Grice's maxims are still considered valid with the notion that their application to humour is not perhaps as simple as the above discussion may suggest.

## 2.5 Earlier research on humour in popular culture

While popular culture is increasingly common as a research subject, only a relatively limited number of studies deal with verbally expressed humour in popular culture. The following section will present some applications.

An interesting article written by Giuseppe Balirano and Marcella Corduas, entitled "Detecting Semiotically-expressed Humor in Diasporic TV Productions", deals with the humour used in the British Asian sketch show *Goodness Gracious Me*. In their article, they discuss how a subject's perception of humorous elements – visual and textual – is influenced by his/her ethnic origin (Indian, British Asian and white British). They use script theory as their starting point in discussing the study of humour *Goodness Gracious Me* and introduce the concept of diasporic humour, as they conclude that the mechanisms

of this kind of a series, which are ultimately hybrid scripts, cannot be dealt with by means of traditional script theory.

Gillian Mansfield's "It's Good to Laugh – Identifying Verbal and Non-Verbal Humour in the British TV Sitcom" seeks to identify the kinds of verbal play that are embedded in the casual sitcom conversation. The texts to be studied in the article are all relatively old, as they aired in the 1970's and 1980's (*'Allo, 'Allo*, *Only Fools and Horses* and *Fawlty Towers*) but this seems to be the writer's intention. It is difficult to draw significant conclusions, but Mansfield discusses various aspects of verbal humour in relation to these series – for example the use of word play (as defined by Chiaro) in sitcoms; failure in a character's use of language, which results in humour; making a boastful person the butt of the humour by a well-timed wisecrack; or the competitive punning and teasing sitcoms are known for.

Both Maria Cristina Paganoni and Gloria Cappelli have studied the humour used in blogs. Arguably, blogs are one of the newest forms of popular media, and they provide the writers a quick and easy way of publishing their views to an audience, which can be surprisingly large, at times. Cappelli concentrates on humour and irony in expatriates' talk, Paganoni on political humour. In "Political Humour in the Blogosphere", Paganoni studies both verbally expressed and visual political humour in two British blogs, Guido Fawkes and Recess Monkey, concentrating on the multimodality of net-mediated humour. She argues that humour in the Internet recontextualizes the traditional repertoire of political humour "within the semiotic coordinates of computer mediated communication" (80). The article's contribution in linguistic sense is relatively poor, but Paganoni does discuss the good and the bad sides of the blogosphere, as well as the way to capitalize on it.



Cappelli's article "'Expats' Talk': Humour and Irony in an Expatriate's Travel Blog", on the other hand, is more concentrated on the ways in which a blogger may use verbal humour. She comments on travel blogs as a new and undervalued genre of the long tradition of travel writing. She uses a restricted sample, but it is an interesting and seemingly productive one. She discusses a particular collection of blog posts called *Rebecca's Views*, and concludes that it uses humour and irony extensively. According to Cappelli, an expatriate is a member of three cultures: the culture s/he comes from, the culture s/he currently lives in and the culture of other expatriates and "slow travellers". She claims that "through humour, the expatriate can make fun of her complex status in a 'face-saving' and retractable way", as for example in

[...] my husband, who, though undoubtedly Italian (who else would pack olive oil for vacation) is not what you'd call a flashy dresser... (23)

or

[...] those black t-shirts printed with the flag of our nation and emblazoned with those immortal words: 'Just try burning this one, a\*\*hole', which make me so proud to be American. (23)

The writer can offer "subtle, ruthless criticism" towards all of the cultures she belongs to: as Cappelli points out, "She tells her stories and expresses her opinions tongue-in-cheek, taking advantage of her rhetorical power of humour and irony" (23).

Ritch Calvin has pointed out that there are "certain segments of academia and certain academics" (3) for whom popular culture in general and television in particular is beneath scrutiny. Nevertheless, Calvin is right to suggest that the more prestigious study subjects, such as theatre and novels, have also been entertainment for the masses. Similarly as there are appallingly written plays and novels, there are always badly written television series

and blogs. But popular culture does produce worthy subjects for study, as well, as Balirano and Corduas and Cappelli show – popular is not synonymous with bad or unworthy of studying, not even when the writer is an amateur.

### 3 Material and methods

In this section I will first introduce my research materials and discuss the humour used in the series. The main emphasis is on the functions of verbally expressed humour rather than examining its linguistic construction. The analysis is entirely qualitative, as there is a lack of quantitative variables to be studied – identifying and comparing, for example, humorous items with non-humorous ones in this context is fruitless. The analysis is inductive, and interested in the micro level rather than trying to offer insights into how humour is used in popular culture, on the whole. The main emphasis is on studying a cultural text and what functions humour has in it. It must be pointed out, that the subjects discussed in this thesis emerge from the data as important, but by no means are they the only ones that could be discussed.

#### 3.1 Gathering the material

For this thesis, I chose five episodes of *Gilmore Girls*: episodes one, two, three and six from the first season (1.1 "Pilot", 1.2 "The Lorelai's first day at Chilton", 1.3 "Kill me now", 1.6 "Rory's birthday parties") and the second episode from season four (4.2 "The Lorelai's first day at Yale"). The length of an episode is ca. 40 minutes, as the data has been gathered from DVD's. I have also used transcripts that are from a free Internet television transcript database, Twiz TV. As the transcripts are not from an official source, each transcript has been revised. Therefore, any mistakes found from the excerpts are mine.

The episodes are chosen relatively randomly, although episode 4.2 was specifically chosen because of its use of register humour. Nevertheless, all episodes contain elements which explain the humour used in the series fairly well. One reason for this is that all except one of the chosen episodes is written either by the show's creator Amy Sherman-Palladino or her husband Daniel Palladino.

After much consideration, 127 cases of verbally expressed humour found from the episodes were chosen as my data. They were divided into 10 categories of verbally expressed humour (joke, sarcasm, irony, banter, satire, parody, allusions, word play, register humour, and saying things funny) and/or four categories of maxims. Some cases belong to multiple categories.

	JOKE	SARCASM	IRONY	BANTER	SATIRE	PARODY	ALLUSION	WORD PLAY	REGISTER	SAYING THINGS FUNNY
1.1	-	4	2	9	-	-	2	-	-	8
1.2	-	8	4	1	-	-	1	2	-	4
1.3	-	1	-	3	-	-	2	10	-	3
1.6	-	6	-	3	1	1	3	-	-	6
4.2	1	3	-	6		-	-	2	3	3
Total	1	22	6	22	1	1	8	14	3	24

Table 3. The number of cases of verbally expressed humour by episode.

Although only five episodes have been chosen, the data is still representative of the series. In addition, I have watched the entire first season in preparation of this thesis, and as a fan of the series, I have also watched all of the seasons earlier. Therefore, despite the fact that my analysis concentrates on the selected episodes, some interpretations may be based on my knowledge of the series on the whole.

### 3.2 The series

*Gilmore Girls* aired between 2000 and 2007 in USA. In *Gilmore Girls*, the protagonist, Lorelai Gilmore (Lauren Graham), is the adult daughter of an upper class New England couple. She has left her privileged life in Hartford behind her when she became pregnant at sixteen. Since then, she has raised her daughter all on her own and her relationship to her parents is virtually non-existent.

Lorelai, now living and working in the fictional small town of Stars Hollow, Connecticut, has worked her way up and is currently the general manager of a small inn. Her daughter, Lorelai or Rory (Alexis Bledel), is now turning sixteen. Rory has had a modest upbringing, but is nevertheless achieving exceptionally well in the local state school, and both the mother and the daughter hope that she will one day go to Harvard. In order to do so, Rory has applied to an exclusive prep school and has been accepted. This starts the chain of events which brings the three generations together – some more voluntarily than others.

Mother-daughter relationships are an important theme of the show. Lorelai has an extremely close relationship to her daughter, but a troubled relationship with her parents Emily and Richard (Kelly Bishop and Edward Herrmann) and has not been in contact with them since her running away, except perhaps during the holidays. Upon Rory's acceptance at the prep school, Lorelai is forced to borrow money from her parents in order to pay for the tuition fees. The only condition for her is that she lets her parents get involved in their life, that is, they start coming for dinner each Friday night. The troubled relationship between Lorelai and her mother and her rejection of an entitled life is contradicted by

Rory's close relationship with her mother and eventually her grandparents, and the ease and eagerness with which she slips into the life her grandparents offer.

The female Gilmores are not the only mothers and daughters in the series. There is one more closely followed relationship, namely that of Lane Kim (Keiko Agena) and her mother, known only as Mrs. Kim (Emily Kuroda). Their relationship, in terms of humour, is strikingly different to that of the Gilmores, as humour is non-existent in the family. While Lane takes her life-long plight with certain nonchalance and jokes about it with Rory and Lorelai, her life is filled with the most ingenious plans to become the person she wants to be, all behind her mother's back. Although humour in the Lane family is non-existent, the difference between the immigrant mother and her daughter who has embraced the American way of life wholly is a constant source of humour. Culture and humour will be dealt with in more detail later on in this thesis.

When it comes to mothers and daughters, in a way, Lane's situation is similar to Lorelai's – they both are rebelling against their parents, albeit in different ways. Lane is an avid listener of music her mother doesn't approve, so she hides her vast collection of music, band t-shirts and other paraphernalia in various hidden compartments in her room. Although she is often seen listening to rock or eating pizza with Rory and Lorelai, in front of her mother she is the compliant daughter her mother wants her to be. However, there is a difference between Lane and Lorelai. Lane's rebellion is silent, whereas Lorelai's rebellion was as loud as she is herself. There are also differences in the way these two women grow to be what they are: Lane does not experience a similar kind of independence as Lorelai, because when Lane is forced to leave her home she starts living with two of her band mates, and eventually marries one of them. Lane's independence is, therefore, less about her being in control of her life regardless of anyone else (which is important to

Lorelai) and more about finding a balance with what she wants for herself and getting her mother to approve of it.

Not surprisingly, the show that concentrates on a "single mother by choice" and on the relationship between three generations of women can be regarded as feminist. Moreover, Aldrich MacBain and Mahato explain that "The basic premise that began *Gilmore Girls* unsettles the long legacy of clichéd representations of motherhood by having its heart an affirming and positive presentation of a mother who is characterized by not only her sex drive and career, but also her single status" (99). Although this is an interesting subject, it will not be discussed in more detail. (Feminism in the series is discussed in length in Calvin.)

One key element in *Gilmore Girls* is the constant use of allusions and more overt references. Ritch Calvin discusses the intertextuality in the show by comparing it to *The Simpsons*:

the interplay of other television shows, politics, current events, history, and other forms of cultural production [in *The Simpsons*] make for a rich, multi-layered text that lends itself to literary or textual analysis. Although the number of references and allusions in any one episode of *Gilmore Girls* may not equal that of any one episodes of *The Simpsons*, it is, nevertheless, richly multi-layered, or "polyvalent" [...]. Amy Sherman-Palladino and the cast of other writers work numerous over and oblique references into the characters' dialogue or plotlines. (9)

Indeed they do, and because of the quick pace of speech – the average script of a *Gilmore Girls* episode is 75–80 pages whereas the average script for an hour long episode of any other series is 45–50 pages (Internet Movie Database) – there are ample opportunities to work those references into the series. However, as Calvin points out,

the allusions are not gratuitous. Indeed, [...] these references, the kinds of references, their sources, and their strategic deployment all contribute to the development of character and the furtherance of a particular worldview. They help signify and separate characters [...] by class, by educational background, and by age. (9)

Some of the allusions and references are discussed in relation to their humorous content later in this thesis.

### 3.3 General implications of humour in the series

Humour permeates much of American television productions. It is not uncommon to come across with otherwise serious programs which use humour as a deviating device. In fact, the hybrid genre of comedy drama (or dramedie) is named such because it combines serious content with humour. For example, *Gilmore Girls* is essentially a drama about women in three generations, but it uses humour to such an extent that it is easily mistaken to be a sitcom, as for example in the following excerpt where Lorelai goes to see her parents unannounced.

LORELAI: Hi, Mom.

EMILY: Lorelai, my goodness, this is a surprise. Is it Easter already?

LORELAI: [laughs nervously] No, I just, uh, finished up my business class and I thought I would stop by.

EMILY: To see me?

LORELAI: Yes.

EMILY: [in ironic tone] Well, isn't that nice. Come in.



LORELAI: Thanks.

....

LORELAI: Hi, dad.

RICHARD: What is it, Christmas already?

Episode 1.1, time 18.22

The hybridization of the genre allows the series combine reality with the fantastic. At its core, the series tries to depict true families with all of their problems. But at the same time, these "true" people are constantly getting themselves into situations that are not in accordance with the everyday life of the viewers. However, because of the truthfulness at the core, the viewer still accepts the fantastical elements but still believe in the series being "real". In addition, since the series is, at its core, mimicking reality, it is also using humour in a way that is similar to everyday situations of the real world.

Bearing in mind what Knuuttila says about the internal nature of humour (cf. section 2.1) and Morreall about the subjectivity of what people find incongruous (cf. section 2.2.3) it can be argued that humour – despite it being an objective phenomenon that can be observed and analyzed – is also subjective: what each person considers funny or humorous depends on that person. The subjectivity of humour is not only a property of the real, everyday people, since it is also visible in the *Gilmore Girls*: humour can be accepted or rejected by the hearer. In the series, Emily is often rejecting Lorelai's humour – Lorelai's sense of humour is different to that of Emily's, and therefore she undermines it. Rory sits in the middle, in more ways than one.

RORY: Let's just start a new topic.

EMILY: [to Lorelai] You're impossible!

LORELAI: She said a new topic, mom.

EMILY: Everything's a joke. Everyone's a punch line.

LORELAI: OK, I'm sorry.

EMILY: My daughter – Henny Youngman.

Episode 1.6, time 00.12

Emily's belittling utterance is also metafictional, as in the series everything can indeed become a joke, and everyone a punch line, especially when the speaker is Lorelai.

Mother-daughter relationships and intertextuality are, as said, important elements in the series. Another important element in the series is Stars Hollow, the fictional town where Lorelai and Rory live. Calvin discusses the "consistent spectacle of color and the festivities of excess that serve to render the small town otherworldly" (2) in a different context, but his main idea is valid: the town is unlike any other. Nevertheless, as Calvin points out, it still does not "fit easy into the traditional conventions of fantasy" (2) – the town has fantastical elements without losing its believability. The incongruity between Stars Hollow and the viewer's everyday experience is still evident. The town is filled with quirky (but not fantasy-like) townspeople and there are constant festivals and situations that would seem strange in any other place, but at which the townspeople do not even bat an eyelid. Therefore, Stars Hollow is an important back-drop for the humour in the series.

Since the series uses humour in a manner that is similar to real life, rather than humour mainly for the sake of humour, there is a genuine possibility of discussing humour from an interpersonal perspective, at least when it comes to the Gilmores. Stars Hollow, on the other hand, is sometimes problematic from the point of view of this thesis. As the town is one inexhaustible source of humour, mostly because of the incongruence between what is "proper" in real life and what is normal and accepted in Stars Hollow, the series

sometimes aims at amusing without using humour as such. For example, in episode 1.2 Lorelai's neighbour Babette Dell (Sally Struthers) is upset because of two men kicking a garden gnome – to her, there is nothing funny, but the viewer is amused. By this it is meant that some cases of verbally expressed humour in the data may seem unhumorous altogether, but it is the underlying intent of amusing that has been an important factor in determining whether or not that example has been accepted.

The hybridization of a genre also enables the series to make use of other characteristics typical for sitcoms. One such "exploitation" is the (rather unfortunate) use of characters for mere comical effect. Luckily, some of the recurring comical characters do receive some traits of "normality", as well, at least during the seven production seasons. The comical characters do, occasionally, also enable the dealing of serious subject matter in a lighter way without making fun of them or the viewers. For example, in episode 1.05, "Cinnamon's wake", the cat of Lorelai's childless neighbours, the Dells, dies. There is immediately a wake organized for the cat, and in a calm moment where Lorelai and Babette are washing the dishes, they also discuss the birth and loss of a "child" and how it affects the "parents", as Babette fears she and her husband Morey (Ted Rooney) might not get over it and end up divorcing. Babette and Morey are a comical pair, a mixed sex version of Pat and Patachon or Laurel and Hardy by appearance, and it would be easy to assume that the setting (a wake for a cat) and the otherwise ditsy character of Babette (not to mention the underlying memories of Sally Struthers as Gloria Bunker Stivic in *All in the Family*) would water down the subject altogether. However, in this context, the comical and the dramatic work in a way that the sequence fits the light-hearted style of the series but does not offend a viewer who might have lost a child.

## 4 Analysis

In the following sections I will discuss how verbally expressed humour is used in the series. I will start by considering humour from the character's point of view. The main emphasis is on Lorelai, as she is the most interesting character from the point of view of this thesis. Secondly, I will closer examine the forms of humour which are used in the series. My aim is to show that certain forms of humour have specific purposes to which they are used. The final section deals with the non-observance of Grice's maxims for humour.

### 4.1 Character setting and relationships

The aim of this thesis is to show that humour is used in a variety of forms and for a variety of reasons, and these include both interpersonal relationships and character setting on the whole. When it comes to individual characters, Lorelai is by far the most versatile user of humour, and she will often be in the focus in the discussion in this thesis. Therefore, it is best to start by examining her humour closer.

#### 4.1.1 Lorelai

Lorelai's humour is, generally, distinguishable in different situations. The humour she uses inside Stars Hollow is very different to the humour she uses with her parents - mostly due to her being self-assured in Stars Hollow but very awkward around her parents. Her self-assurance is an important factor when considering her humour, on the whole: humour is

her main strategy when interacting with other people, but as soon as she becomes uncertain of herself, her behaviour changes. Her humour is affected by this change and it does not help her to win people over – which usually is one of the functions of Lorelai's humour. In the following example, Lorelai is trying to be funny, but fails miserably.

LORELAI: Right, okay. Well, I can vouch for this man. I mean, I know he cared for Nicole, and apparently they both got a little rash. I mean, not in 'apply to affected area twice daily' rash, I mean rash in that they hastily entered into a union.

MR. BLODGETT: We know all this.

LORELAI: But if you think he married her to get something, I know that's not true. He's basically a hermit, and happy to be one. I could show you his place upstairs. I mean, you half expect Hare Krishnas to jump out of the bathroom banging tambourines. All he likes is fishing and watching baseball, and he's got a reel and he's got a TV, so he's all set. So when he says he wants nothing, I know he means it. Because when I think of Luke Danes, I think nothing.

Episode 4.2, time 17.31

In this example, Lorelai's good friend Luke Danes (Scott Patterson) forces Lorelai to be his character witness of a sort for the army of lawyers that have come to his diner on behalf of his wife. Lorelai is caught off guard, which is reflected in her speech. Her statement is in unison with her normal style of speech, meaning that she is violating the maxim of quantity and her utterances are, if not strictly speaking humorous, then at least colourful and, her last comment especially, sarcastic. However, her faint attempts at humour do not possess

the similar appeal as they would for the townspeople. In fact, one of the lawyers simply comments to Luke that "Your choice of character witness does nothing to allay our concerns" (4.2 "The Lorelai's first day at Yale").

Although in this instance Lorelai's humour does not win over the outsiders, there are only few cases where Lorelai's humour misses the mark in Stars Hollow. This is mostly due because Lorelai is liked and popular in the town and her flamboyant sense of humour is both understood and appreciated. It is safe to say that she fits the quirky setting very well, and there is a genuine sense of "live and let live" in the town. When encountering problems at work or at home, she usually manages to tackle them with humour and in an up-beat way. Most of the time, her humour is benevolent, or perhaps slightly prickly towards her daughter, closest friends and colleagues. An example can be seen in the following where Lorelai is talking with her best friend, Sookie St. James (Melissa McCarthy), who is also the chef at the inn.

SOOKIE:       Where's your paté?

LORELAI:     At Zsa Zsa Gabor's house.

...

SOOKIE:       You feel like duck?

LORELAI:     Ooh, if it's made with chicken, absolutely.

Episode 1.1, time 17.22

Sookie it at Lorelai's house, and she wants to make something to eat. Of course, Sookie's idea of a casual, no-fuss dinner with friends is distinctly different to that of Lorelai's, whose diet consists mainly of take-out food and Pop-tarts. Although Lorelai appreciates the talent and expertise of her friend, she also needs to remind Sookie who she is talking to.

Lorelai is often making fun of her male friends and lovers. The two usual butts of her jokes are the inn's concierge Michel Gerard (Yanic Truesdale) and Luke but this is not to say that she would hesitate to poke fun at other men, as well. Michel, Luke and the men Lorelai is dating at any given time may not be always equally quick-witted, but are worthy adversaries, nonetheless. Women, on the other hand, are generally left alone by Lorelai, with the exception of Rory and Emily. This is not to say that Lorelai does not use humour around women, such as her best friend Sookie, but she is generally laughing with them rather than at them. An example of this is seen in the following example, where Lorelai explains the brief moment when she thought she and Emily might become closer again.

SOOKIE: It's too bad you couldn't get your mom to relinquish Friday night.

[Rory's birthday that Lorelai wanted to have free from the obligatory dinner]

LORELAI: No, she has her Vulcan death grip on that one.

SOOKIE: Not that surprising though.

LORELAI: Emily Gilmore – you could set your watch by her. Oh, you know what she did do last night?

SOOKIE: Wore jeans?

LORELAI: Served pudding.

SOOKIE: I was close!

LORELAI: I mean, I'm sure it was some expensive form of pudding, but nonetheless, it was pudding!

SOOKIE: That is amazing.

LORELAI: Right. That would mean that she actually made a mental note that we

liked pudding, which would mean that she actually listened to something other than the judgmental conga line going on in her head, and got over the fact that, to her, pudding is hospital food, and only acceptable when you've just had vital organ ripped out of your body.

SOOKIE: Wow, that's some journey she had to take there.

Episode 1.6, time 04.33

In this discussion, Sookie is just as much involved in the humour as Lorelai. Although Lorelai is making fun of *a* woman, her mother, she is not making fun of Sookie but having a sort of discussion that would most likely not occur when Lorelai is a man. This is mainly because although the distinction between Sookie's and Lorelai's styles is visible (Sookie talks in short sentences, Lorelai in long ones), their mutual understanding and cooperation is undeniable.

Lorelai also uses humour when negotiating with her clients, vendors, and staff. At those situations, she is naturally at her best behaviour since it is for the good of the company she works for, but her approach does not always follow strictly conventional business manners, either. Her approach is, however, effective. Lorelai's humour is one of the key elements in the way she is perceived professionally: she is competent, effective yet approachable, and an excellent negotiator. An example of this is given in the following, where Lorelai controls the conversation with her flirty tone of voice, although she is pure business.

LORELAI: Has the plumber attended to room four yet?

MICHEL: He was here, he did nothing, it's a hundred dollars.

LORELAI: [Calls the plumber] Hi Marco, Lorelai. Talk to me about room four.



What was wrong with it? [pause] Uh huh. I thought you replaced that already. [pause] Well, because you told me you did and I never forget anything, so this one's on you, right? [pause] Pleasure doing business with you. [hangs up]

Episode 1.1, time 05.58

As I have mentioned above, Lorelai's humour is representative of her self-image, and this self-image, and therefore the way in which she is perceived, changes according to where she is. In Stars Hollow, she is a confident single-mother by choice, happy with the way her life has turned out and enjoying her work and the humour she uses is in accordance with her positive self-image. Outside Stars Hollow, however, there is both a physical and mental shift from a self-assured, witty woman into a clumsy, awkward and incoherent bundle of nerves. It is not necessarily Lorelai's humour that changes, but the fact that her humour is not appreciated or understood affects her behaviour considerably. Lorelai empowers herself with humour, and when that strategy does not work, it makes her uncomfortable. This is seen in the following example.

LORELAI: Hi! Oh, hi, hi. Yeah, uh, my daughter Rory has just been accepted - yay. [pause] Thank you, and, um, I got the invoice for your enrollment fee. Wow, that is a lot of zeros behind that five. [pause] Uh huh. Okay, well, I guess what I'm wondering is if you couldn't take, say, part of it now, just to get her going? [pause] Well, but she's supposed to start Monday. It just doesn't give me a lot of time to pull a bank job. [pause] Well, never mind, I was just kidding. [pause] No, a bank job is robbing a bank but... [pause] Uh-huh. Oh, no. No, no,

no. I don't want you to give up her space. I'll just – I'll have to figure it out. [pause] Okay. No, thank you. It's been a real *treat* talking to you. [pause] Yeah. Bye-bye.

Episode 1.1, time 15.10

Her self-assurance is at its lowest whenever she encounters people that have the same social status as her parents, especially since her attempts of humour (such as "not enough time to pull a bank job" here) are lost on them. Effectively, she has never been able to adjust her behaviour to what the upper class considers proper. She is still the rebel she was in her adolescence, but as she is an adult and a parent, she cannot resort to her old ways. Unfortunately, she has not found any alternative set of strategies to deal with either or parents or the members of their social class, which leaves her vulnerable. In this example, although she cannot resort to her old ways, she does find the chance to broadcast her views on the helpfulness of the discussion, meaning the high pitched, sarcastic tone of voice in *treat*. It is noteworthy that Lorelai seldom changes her tone of voice in such a way, but at this instance she cannot help but let her exasperation show for this brief moment.

#### 4.1.2 The Gilmores

As said, mother-daughter relationships are central in the series. The relationship Lorelai has with both her daughter and her mother is significant from the perspective of humour.

Humour between Rory and Lorelai is versatile. On one hand, they do not have a "normal" mother-daughter relationship but behave more like sisters: they are often lending each other's clothes and make-up, painting toenails, etc. and, most importantly, Lorelai only rarely plays the "mom" card (see e.g. Calvin 5–6). In addition, they have the same

taste in music and movies, and find similar things funny. They also have a multitude of traditions and customs, such as movie nights that are cherished by both of them. Importantly, the humour they use is representative of this mutual appreciation. The fact that they are often bantering one another can actually be seen as a way of maintaining their relationship.

RORY: I can't believe tomorrow's my last day at Stars Hollow High.

LORELAI: I know.

RORY: Today I was so excited I dressed for gym.

LORELAI: You're kidding!

RORY: And I played volleyball.

LORELAI: With other people?

RORY: And I learned that all this time I was avoiding group sports?

LORELAI: Yeah?

RORY: Was very smart because I suck at them.

LORELAI: Well, yeah, you got that from me.

Episode 1.1, time 17.07

Here Lorelai is bantering Rory ("You're kidding!", "With other people?"), but the two are definitely laughing at themselves, too, as Rory confesses that she is not good in group sports and Lorelai "takes the blame" for her failure, since she is her mother.

On the other hand, the two women's senses of humour are significantly different – Lorelai masters references to popular culture, whereas Rory is also at home when the discussion turns into classics. Rory's sense of humour is significantly duller – or more appropriate – than Lorelai's and the gap between them seems to become especially wide whenever they are outside Stars Hollow – whether it is visiting the older Gilmores or

meetings in Chilton etc. Rory does appreciate her mother's sense of humour, but cannot resist teasing her for it.

LORELAI: Rory, I love you. I would take a bullet for you. But I'd rather stick something sharp in my ear than go to the [golf] club with you.

RORY: Fine.

LORELAI: I'd rather slide down a banister of razor blades and land in a pool of alcohol than go to the club with you.

RORY: I got it.

LORELAI: Don't stop me, I'm on a roll. I'd rather eat my own hand than go to the club with you. Ooh, I'd rather get my face surgically altered to look like that lunatic rich lady with the lion head than go to the club with you.

RORY: Would you like me to drive so you can continue your diatribe?

LORELAI: Would ya? Thanks. I'd rather cut off my head and use it as a punch bowl than go to the club with you.

Episode 1.3, time 06.16

Lorelai's different sense of humour also sets her apart from her mother and father – one part of this is because of the differences in their lifestyles. The gap between the lifestyles between Lorelai and her parents is much wider than that of Rory and her grandparents. Lorelai has rejected the lifestyle of the rich, whereas Rory is more than happy to accept all its benefits, and to comply with (most of) the rules and expectations that lifestyle entails. However, as the example above shows, Lorelai is unwilling to follow the rules of that world. The unease with which she visits her former home often manifests

itself in joking and humour – a form of humour that her parents do not appreciate and therefore act as if they would not understand her.

EMILY: But there are five days in a school week.

LORELAI: Really? Are you sure? Because my days-of-the-week underwear only go to Thursday.

EMILY: Is that a joke?

Episode 1.2, time 18.14

It is noteworthy here, that although Lorelai is commenting on "her" underwear, she is ultimately making her mother the butt of the joke and thus dismissing her power. Lorelai gets away with these kinds of responses, as she is not actually retorting or quarrelling, and she has a slightly better possibility of getting what she wants for her and for Rory. Lorelai's humour is, nonetheless, undermined by her mother. All in all, Lorelai's behaviour is in stark contrast with her "normal" self, and her humour becomes much more negative once she steps into her former home or is otherwise in contact with her parents. Furthermore, the majority of Lorelai's sarcasm is aimed at her mother and only rarely towards her father, although such instances are also found. For instance;

RORY: So, grandpa, how's the insurance biz?

RICHARD: Oh, people die, we pay. People crash cars, we pay. People lose a foot, we pay.

LORELAI: Well, at least you have your new slogan.

Episode 1.1, time 35.22

Although Lorelai is trying (and mostly succeeding) to escape the patriarchal control, her revolt towards her parents – the patriarchy of her childhood – seems to be personified to her mother. Melanie Haupt mentions how the patriarch, Richard, looms over the family,

observing but not participating (116). This is a fair description of him, especially in the sense that during Lorelai's childhood, he has been busy at work, and therefore absent from the home. Nevertheless, Emily's power in the home and in the community depends on her husband; she is not a matriarch by any stretch of imagination. Yet, she embodies Lorelai's negative feelings towards her parents because she has been home, overseeing Lorelai's upbringing, while Richard has been more interested in his career. However, Richard still is and always has been the head of the house: Emily might run the house, but Richard has the final say. This tactic has been quite successful for him on the whole, since it has left him outside the quarrels of his wife and daughter and his relationship with the latter, therefore, is not as turbulent as Emily's relationship with her. It must be pointed out, however, that although Richard is seldom the object of Lorelai's sarcasm, when it comes to humour, this is not necessarily a positive phenomenon. On the contrary, it is a signal of Richard falling out of Lorelai's "gaze" in the sense that Lorelai does not see him as a potential "person to use humour with". In Lorelai's case, this is a sign of distance – though different distance to that between her and Emily – since her main strategy when establishing and maintaining relationships is to use humour.

When considering the family as a whole, they all have distinct senses of humour but these senses of humour are overlapping with someone else in the family. Unfortunately, however, these overlaps do not form a closed set but can only be seen as a vertical line from Lorelai to Rory to Emily to Richard. One might argue that Lorelai and Emily are at the opposite ends of the scale, but this is not true. Despite all their differences of opinions, when it comes to humour, Lorelai and Emily still have more in common than the father-daughter pair.

#### 4.1.3 The good and the bad inside and outside Stars Hollow

In the series, verbally expressed humour is often used as a way distinguishing between "good" and "bad" characters, or friendly and unfriendly. Lorelai, Rory, Lane, Luke, Miss Patty (Liz Torres) and other habitants of Stars Hollow are depicted as friendly, and the fact that they use and "understand" verbally expressed humour supports that notion – a mere comical appearance, as in the case of Kirk Gleason (Sean Gunn), is not enough.

There are two townswomen, Babette Dell and Miss Patty, that, as the heart and soul of the town, are key in establishing the humour of Stars Hollow. Babette is a somewhat silly character, but although she is extremely important in describing the town, her role as a user of humour is, quite surprisingly, more a passive one. There were not any cases of Babette using verbally expressed humour in the data, but she is often along when the townspeople get together and have a laugh. She sometimes engenders humour by her mere presence, and the way she is distinctly "a person from Stars Hollow", meaning that she has that other-worldly air about her, although it is hard to pinpoint what exactly that is. She has a "good" sense of humour and she makes Lorelai and Rory (and the viewer) on a good mood, occasionally because she is an easy and willing target of humour.

BABETTE: [of a cat] I'm callin' him and I'm callin' him and I go around the porch  
and this big orange tush is just starin' me in the face.

LORELAI: I hate when that happens.

Episode 1.3, time 29.55

Miss Patty, on the other hand, is a highly hedonistic figure that is not only a passive but an active source of humour – and not an easy target. She is often seen smoking at the open door of her dance studio, paying equal or more attention to what is going on in the

street than in the studio. Her teaching methods can be regarded a bit dubious, as her language is colourful considering the fact that her pupils hardly old enough to go to school.

MISS PATTY: Visualize, ladies. It's a Thanksgiving Day parade. You're standing on Fifth Avenue. There's a hundred beautiful boys marching in place behind you. And there you are. You are out in front with your fabulous legs and your perfect tush. Your baton is on fire and the crowd goes *nuts*! Okay, cookie time.

Episode 1.2, time 16.37

It is noteworthy that much of the humour in the series and in Miss Patty's utterances, such as in this excerpt, is not necessarily "joking" in the broad sense of the word, meaning that *what* is being said is not necessarily funny, it is *how* it is said – falling into the category of "saying things funny". It must also be pointed out that the humour in this category is often highly context-bound, as it is here, too, since the context is one part of the incongruity. Here, incongruity is one of the key elements engendering humour, since there is both incongruity with social norms (what is appropriate to say to the young students) and incongruity in the utterances, themselves, as she abruptly calls for a cookie time – a cigarette time for Miss Patty, for sure.

Miss Patty as a character is perhaps most humorous in the eyes of the adult viewer. Her humour is not incomprehensible to the younger viewer, either, but as "a thing or event is not incongruous *simpliciter*, but only relative to someone's conceptual scheme" (Morreall *Taking Laughter Seriously*, 60) it can be argued that the adult's more developed conceptual scheme is needed for the full understanding of it. On the whole, Miss Patty is depicted as a laid-back (yet nosy) and unconventional dance teacher who is not afraid to be what she is, and her colourful language is "forgiven". Moreover, although this plump



teacher is often living in the memories of her fabulous past, she is not a tragic figure, but a comic and positive one.

Stars Hollow is not entirely filled with happy-go-lucky characters, as there are townspeople like the strict Mrs. Kim who never jokes around. The lack of humour in the Kim household makes Lane extremely sympathetic but renders her mother unlikeable. In a town where everyone else – even the grumpy Luke – has a good sense of humour, the person that does not appreciate humour at all seems to be the eccentric one. This brings up the notion of outsiders.

Outsiders in Stars Hollow are often depicted as serious or otherwise unsympathetic, and Mrs. Kim is no exception. Mrs. Kim, although a resident in the town, is an immigrant from Korea. Despite the many years she has spent in America, she has maintained her Korean identity and customs, and because of her unwillingness to assimilate into the community (which would ultimately mean losing her identity), she is still an outsider. Other such examples of outsiders are Luke's sulky and ill-behaving nephew Jess Mariano (Milo Ventimiglia), and Michel, the only black person in the town, and also an immigrant from France. Though Michel uses humour, it is exclusively sarcastic and his overall attitude towards everyone else is arrogant.

[A guest at the inn stops Michel to ask him something]

WOMAN: Oh, excuse me sir. Can you tell me where we can find the best antiques?

MICHEL: At your house, I'd guess. [walks off]

Episode 1.2, time 23.37

The outsiders in Stars Hollow are often stereotypical in one form or another. Mrs. Kim follows the stereotype that Koreans never laugh, whereas Michel follows the stereotype

that the French are arrogant. Another stereotype, that of the effeminate Frenchmen, is broadcasted in the way he speaks, and his sexuality questioned by the fact that he is never seemingly interested in women.

[Rory is asking Michel to proofread her French essay]

RORY: Come on, Michel. I'll tell all the ladies what a stud you are.

MICHEL: [in an indifferent tone of voice] Hm. I believe that memo has already been sent.

Episode 1.1, time 6.40

Michel's current place of domicile is never revealed, and he is never seen in the multitude of social gatherings around the town. However, regardless of his place of domicile he is, interestingly, a member of the community and an outsider at the same time. Having worked at the inn, he is closely connected to the community where everybody knows everybody. Yet, he is clearly an outsider, too, because, similarly to Mrs Kim, Michel has not sought to assimilate himself wholly into the American culture. He is, nevertheless, European, and therefore there is less of a culture clash with his new and old home country, as opposed to Mrs. Kim. The fact that Michel uses (sarcastic) humour whereas Mrs Kim does not seem to understand humour at all, might be seen as an indication of the different statuses of these two outsiders.

If the outsiders of the Stars Hollow community are serious and unfriendly, so, too, are people who do not live there at all. For example, the students and teachers at Chilton are both serious and unfriendly as they are not meant to be liked but illustrate the difficulties Rory faces when trying to settle into entirely new surroundings. A thirty minute bus ride from Stars Hollow takes her into a world of snobbery and fierce rivalry, where friendliness and empathy are undervalued. The only exception to the rigidity of Chilton is

Rory's teacher Max Medina, who is approved by both Lorelai and the viewer for his good sense of humour. Sympathy towards Max is necessary, as Max later becomes Lorelai's lover, an insider for a brief moment.

The older Gilmores, also living outside Stars Hollow, present an interesting mix of humour and unfriendliness in the series. Their relationship to the younger Gilmores is not black-and-white, and this is also noticeable in their humour. They are not serious in the sense that they would not kid and joke, but, as I have already shown, their humour is strikingly different from that of Lorelai's.

LORELAI: I thought the cook was Heidi.

EMILY: Oh, no, we let Heidi go months ago. She had a problem closing things – the door, the refrigerator...

RICHARD: The liquor bottle.

Episode 1.3, time 1.12

It is noteworthy, that Emily and Richard's behaviour and humour is in accordance with the social status they have. The clash between what Lorelai and her parents find humorous is a result of the fact that Lorelai has acquired a low-class identity by leaving her childhood home. By doing that, Lorelai has gained the freedom to act the way she wants to, and not the way she is expected to – outside her childhood home, that is. In the presence of her parents, she is expected to behave according to her "real" class, which causes friction between the three – and, ultimately, is a common source of verbal combat between Lorelai and Emily.

Maurice Charney's suggestion that "comedy deals in stereotypes rather than fully rounded, three-dimensional, living characters" (50) is valid in *Gilmore Girls*, as well. Although the two generations of Gilmores are fully rounded and three-dimensional as they

form the "family drama section" of the series, there are various recurring characters that work mainly on stereotypes – at their core, at least. In a way, verbally expressed humour is also used to stereotypically distinguishing between the good and the bad: it is not as evident as wearing light or dark clothes, but the distinction is still fairly quick and easy to make. The *Gilmore Girls* stereotype of VEH is that only the good (and friendly) use it, and the bad do not. The case of the older Gilmores only goes to show that the series is able to twist and turn the stereotypes it has itself created.

On the whole, humour in the series is instrumental in describing the relationships between characters. The series is a family drama, but there are families that do not share blood relations at all but share a relationship through humour. In Stars Hollow, Lorelai has accumulated a true family around her – a family that consist not only of Rory, but numerous Stars Hollow inhabitants, as well. The inhabitants have defined their own norms in the town, and one of those norms seems to be "the crazier, the better". As mentioned above, there is a true sense of "live and let live" in the town, not to mention taking life with a bit of humour. The use of humour is essential in the town, since you only become an insider, a family member, if you have a sense of humour. For Lorelai, this is the home she always wanted: the family she was born in has lost its meaning to her since her running away, but she is now surrounded by people that make her feel safe, comfortable, and at peace.

#### 4.2 Forms of humour

The above discussion has concentrated on the general themes using verbally expressed humour in the series. In this section, however, the emphasis is on how different forms of verbally expressed humour are used in the series.

All except one form of humour introduced in the theory section were found in the data. The lack of puns will be dealt with later. However, it was found that the different forms sometimes have distinct purposes in the series, or, that through certain forms of humour certain purposes may be accomplished. The two most frequently used forms of humour are sarcasm and banter (22 cases each). It must be pointed out, however, that distinguishing between sarcasm and banter is sometimes difficult, since banter may rely on sarcasm, irony and other mechanisms.

Sarcasm and banter have an important role in explaining the relationships between characters. Similar to allusions explaining the characters themselves, sarcasm and banter explain the relationships between them. For example, when it comes to Lorelai, her humour, as discussed, becomes increasingly sarcastic when she and her mother are in contact, and sarcasm thus represents distance. This is not to say that sarcasm is only used for signalling distance, since for Lorelai, sarcasm is often her basic "mode" of humour when talking with men. In those cases, sarcasm is not a device for distancing as much as showing her independence and self-assurance. In the following example, a part of the opening scene of the pilot, the way Lorelai uses sarcasm to deal with situations sets the mood for the rest of the series.

[Lorelai is at the diner, waiting for Rory. She gets an unwanted, younger suitor in her table and she is trying to get rid of him nicely.]

JOEY: Yeah, I've never been here before. Just, uh, passing through on my

way to Hartford.

LORELAI: You're a regular Jack Kerouac. [sarcastic]

JOEY: Yeah. [taking the comment at face value]

LORELAI: Yeah. [in disbelief]

...

LORELAI: I just, I'm really meeting someone, so...

JOEY: So I guess I should get going.

LORELAI: So soon?

JOEY: What?

LORELAI: I'm just screwing with your mind, Joey. It's nice to meet you. Enjoy Hartford.

#### Episode 1.1, time 1.20

Throughout the discussion, Lorelai maintains a friendly tone of voice although it is clear she does not want to be dealing with the man – his interest in her is unwelcomed. Lorelai is accustomed to dealing with people at work, and this off-duty encounter is treated with a similar kind of poise and certainty. She is, however, having a little fun at his expense, which is the way she treats most men regardless of where and how she meets them. As said earlier, it is her way of showing independence. The "single mother by choice" is perfectly capable of taking care of herself and, most often, gaining the upper hand, leaving the other person somewhat uncertain – all this in a friendly, assertive voice and a few sarcastic remarks.

As said, sarcasm and banter both have an important role in explaining the relationships in the series. Whereas sarcasm can signal distance or negative feelings, banter is more benevolent at nature, and thus aimed at maintaining the relationships Lorelai holds

dear. An example on banter has already been given in section 4.1.2, and another will be given below, so no example will be given here. Nevertheless, the fact that banter is used for maintaining relationships is not surprising when bearing in mind the Banter Principle cited in 2.3.5. Geoffrey N. Leech's Banter Principle states that "In order to show solidarity with *h*, say something which is (i) obviously untrue and (ii) obviously impolite to *h*" (144). Although, when collecting the data, I have considered banter from Norrick's point of view, meaning that banter is humorous discourse oriented toward a common theme though aimed at mutual entertainment, the Banter Principle is still valid in making the point: the main element in banter is to show solidarity. In fact, the use of banter as a way of maintaining their relationship is characteristic to both Lorelai and Rory. The two love teasing one another, showing their mutual understanding and respect. Rory especially teases her mother when she gets carried away, but as Lorelai is not afraid to make a fool of herself and Rory's comments are not truly judgmental, the comments are not hurtful, either. The two have a great relationship and great time with another, and banter is one part of it.

Although the series is as much about Rory as it is about Lorelai, the latter has been chosen as the main character to be discussed in this thesis as she is the most versatile user of humour. From all the 10 categories to which the humour in the series was divided, Lorelai's humour belonged to nine.

CATEGORY		EXAMPLE
Sarcasm	LORELAI:	[to Rory] Okay, look, I know you and me are having a thing here and I know you hate me but I need you to be civil, at least through dinner and then on the way home you can pull a Menendez. Deal?
		Episode 1.1, time 33.15
Irony	LUKE:	You wanna know what this stuff does to your central nervous system?
	LORELAI:	Ooh, do you have a chart? 'Cause I love charts.

	LUKE:	Forget it, kill yourself.	Episode 1.2, time 16.01
Banter	RORY:	How about this?	
	LORELAI:	Yeah, you know the stick we were talking about before? It looks like it's somewhere else now.	
	RORY:	You're having serious Annie Leibovitz delusions here.	Episode 4.2, time 01.17
Satire	RORY:	So, is this party Grandma's having going to be a big deal?	
	LORELAI:	Not really. The government will close that day. Flags will fly at half-mast. Barbra Streisand will give her final concert... again.	
	RORY:	Uh-huh.	
	LORELAI:	Now, the Pope has previous plans, but he's trying to get out of them. However, Elvis and Jim Morrison are coming and they're bringing chips.	
	RORY:	You ask a simple question...	Episode 1.6, time 04.08
Parody	LORELAI:	[at 4 o'clock in the morning, Lorelai has crept into Rory's bed] And it's so hard to believe that at exactly this time many moons ago, I was lying in exactly the same position...	
	RORY:	Oh, boy. Here we go.	
	LORELAI:	Only I had a huge, fat stomach and big fat ankles and I was swearing like a sailor...	
	RORY:	On leave.	
	LORELAI:	On leave... right! And there I was...	
	RORY:	In labor.	
	LORELAI:	And while some have called it the most meaningful experience of your life, to me it was something more akin to doing the splits on a crate of dynamite.	
	RORY:	I wonder if the Waltons ever did this.	
	LORELAI:	And I was screaming and swearing and being surrounded as I was by a hundred prominent doctors, I just assumed there was an actual use for the cup of ice chips they gave me.	
	RORY:	There wasn't.	
	LORELAI:	But pelting the nurses sure was fun.	Episode 1.6, time 14.00
Allusion	SOOKIE:	[to Jackson, who has successfully cross-pollinated raspberry and kumquat] How did you do this?	
	LORELAI:	You didn't build one of those machines like in "The Fly" did you? We're not going to find you wandering the streets wearing a raspberry head, crying "Eat me!"	Episode 1.6, time 05.40



Word play		[Talking about Chilton on Friday night dinner. Rory needs to choose which team sport she wants to play at school.] LORELAI: I told her she should go out for the debating team. RORY: It's not a sport. LORELAI: It is the way the Gilmores play. Episode 1.3, time 03.05
Register	LORELAI:	We'll be those dirty, filthy, almost-French Stars Hollow girls. [in French accent] Oh, we spit on you, you repressed puritanical ninnies. RORY: [in French accent] We smirk in your general direction. LORELAI: [in French accent] We cast sidelong glances that are vague but slightly threatening. RORY: [in French accent] We eschew your quaint double entendre for the appealing lasciviousness of the entendre singular. LORELAI: We... eh... I'm out. RORY: Me, too. Get the light. Episode 4.2, time 34.15
Saying things funny	LORELAI:	[Telling how she hurt her leg] Yeah, three years ago during a yoga class. The headstand portion took a very ugly turn. The good thing was I brought the smug, blonde, pretzel chick down with me. I've since learned that I'm a bit too competitive for yoga. Episode 1.6, time 38.10

Table 4. Lorelai as a user of humour.

The examples above give a fairly good idea of Lorelai as a whole: she is quick-witted, outgoing, loves popular culture references, and she is not afraid to joke about herself or to make herself look like a fool. The close relationship that Lorelai and Rory have is also visible in the examples: Lorelai is negotiating situations in a slightly unconventional way (telling Rory she can "pull a Menendez", murder her with a shotgun), they are often engaged in friendly banter, or just kid and joke together. The example on word play also illustrates the relationship Lorelai has with her parents: the "Gilmore's debating is a team sport" joke is obviously pre-rehearsed, in a way, but Lorelai is not afraid to tell the same joke again in the presence of her mother, although – or because – it reveals her thoughts on her family.

As said, Lorelai's uses different forms of humour quite frequently. The only form of humour that could not directly be found from the data was joke. Although it is difficult to draw conclusions from a sample of one, in this case, joking has a negative status. In the following example, it is Luke who is portrayed in a negative way, since he is acting inappropriately by refusing to answer the lawyer in a civilized manner.

LUKE:            Okay, if I give you my lawyer's name, will you leave?

MR. BYNES:    I will leave.

LUKE:            Okay, you ready?

MR. BYNES:    Yes.

LUKE:            His name is Don Dewey. He works at the firm of Dewey...

MR. BYNES     Dewey.

LUKE:            Cheatham...

MR. BYNES:    Cheatham.

LUKE:            And Howe.

MR. BYNES:    Dewey, Cheatham, and Howe. That was very immature.

LUKE:            Yeah, well, tickled me.

MR. BYNES:    My bosses are gonna wanna hear this.

LUKE:            Oh, come on, they've heard that one before. Oh, hey, if you want  
Don's number, it's 555-5555.

Episode 4.2, time 06.20

Since Lorelai's humour always has a positive status (it is the listener who does not understand her), it is therefore understandable that Lorelai does not joke, in the strict sense of the word.

The problem with Lorelai's humour and the humour in the series as a whole is that it does not always conform to the "rules" cited here. The humour does, almost always, conform to the general principle of incongruity in one form or another. However, since the series is mimicking everyday discussions of everyday people (be it with a twist), the forms of verbally expressed humour that are most often scripted rather than occurring spontaneously, are underrepresented. Two such forms are parody and satire. Arguably, the series is not interested in political issues, which is a further reason for the lack of these forms. Indeed, the examples given in the previous table are the only ones found from the data, and, admittedly, they might be classified as something else. For example, the example on satire is definitely a prime case of non-observance of Grice's maxims, but it might also be taken only as a severe case of irony. Since the excerpt (not to mention Lorelai) is ridiculing the stubbornness of the upper class women on the whole, and Emily in particular, it has been classified as satire. Although the excerpt might be a poor representative of its category, it is a good representative of Lorelai's humour on the whole: it is over-the-top, humouring her and Rory, but making fun of Emily.

The other underrepresented form of humour is parody. The only example found is a relatively good one, although it is not parodying one particular subtext or a genre – birthday stories hardly counts as one. What is being parodied, however, is a myriad of tales the parents tell their children, and the whole idea of a close-knit family (such as the Waltons) gathering together to hear one. But it does, again, represent the closeness between Lorelai and Rory, since it is one of their customs and they are both invested in it. Rory cannot help but banter Lorelai, but only vaguely. Moreover, Lorelai loves being teased (when it's done with humour), so Rory is doing her part in maintaining their relationship.

Sarcasm, irony, and banter are all well represented in the data, and there are plenty of examples to choose from. As such, the examples given here are relatively good ones, even though that there have been some ulterior motives when choosing them. For example, the ironical comment aimed at Luke explains the relationship between him and Lorelai: they are friends, but Lorelai is constantly teasing him when he is trying to discuss something seriously – which is relatively often, since Luke is both environmentally active and appalled by the way Lorelai and Rory consume coffee and is frequently trying to give them some advice (or change their coffee into decaffeinated coffee or herbal tea).

It must be admitted that punning and word play are somewhat overlapping categories, but word play is a wider phenomenon than punning. It must be pointed out, however, that although punning has been introduced in section 2.3 because of its prominence in traditional humour research, there are no cases of real punning in the series. When considering the negative status the joke in the data has, and that according to Ritchie there is "a widely established habit of groaning in response to a pun rather than laughing" (108), not to mention the fact that humour in the series seeks to avoid clichés, it is not surprising that there are not any puns in the data. None of the cases of word play in the data do not depend on lexical ambiguity, and therefore are not punning. The cases of word play in the data, are, however, most often either ironic or sarcastic, which is in unison to the majority of humour in the Gilmore family. They share the abovementioned characteristics of Gilmore humour, meaning that they can be used for conveying both negative and positive sentiments. What is noteworthy about word play, however, is that it is used by four upper class characters, such as Emily and Richard Gilmore, Richard's friend at the golf club and headmaster Hanlin Charleston in Chilton.

HEADMASTER [to Lorelai when she and Rory are meeting him for the first time]

CHARLESTON: Your father and I are golf rivals. We're still fighting it out to see which one is worse.

Episode 1.2, time 08.45

The other characters that play on words are Lorelai and Michel. Word play can thus said to be an upper class phenomenon, since no low-class characters use it. Lorelai is upper class by heritage if not by current profession, and Michel is always acting as if he was significantly higher in the class system than he actually is.

Another two overlapping categories are STF, or saying things funny, and allusion. This is due to the fact that often the utterances including allusions fall under the STF category, but they have been singled out as they use allusions. It must also be pointed out, that an allusion, as such, has not been a sufficient characteristic of an utterance to be chosen, but there has to be the intent to amuse. (And the intent to amuse, more often than not, manifests itself as saying things funny.) The examples from both categories are representative of Lorelai's humour: she is frequently (but not only) alluding to popular culture and often in a clever way and is not afraid of joke about others or of herself. The object of her comment is Jackson Belleville (Jackson Douglas), who is a local vendor of the inn, so they are in good terms. Jackson does not mind her poking fun at him, since he is quite accustomed to it – as said, humour is Lorelai's basic mode of interacting with people. The example given is also a further proof that it is men that Lorelai often targets personally, not women. The only exception to this rule is Rory: not even Emily is targeted the same way, even though she and Lorelai are often engaged in heated debates that often are sarcastic in tone.

The last, if not quite the least, category to be discussed here is register humour. The example given here is by far the clearest one, and, again, illustrative of the peculiar relationship between Lorelai and Rory – especially when bearing in mind that they are in Yale, and Lorelai has stayed over for the night in the dormitory because of Rory's "separation anxiety". On the general level, Lorelai and Rory feed off each other, in the sense that they are both full of silly ideas and equally ready to go with any silly ideas the other might have.

As a conclusion on the matter of forms of humour, I want to stress that although the example on register humour illustrates the humour in the relationship between Rory and Lorelai well, there are not any conclusions that can be made on how register humour is used in the series on the whole. In the case of register humour, but also parody and satire, the reason for this is that there are too few examples, but in the case of other categories, where there are plenty of examples, they tend to lack common features. In fact, sarcasm and banter are the only category for which a set of purposes is distinguished. For other categories, these sets of purposes are non-existent, although individual cases might have plenty of explanatory power on the relationship between the speakers. It is an undeniable fact that the series uses humour for establishing and illustrating relationships and characters, but humour, in general, is such a "playground" for the writers of the series that it is impossible to give all-encompassing explanations on it.

#### 4.3 Grice's maxims as constructing humour

As the final subject of this thesis, I will discuss how Grice's conversational maxims have been flouted in the series for humoristic purposes. There were in total 31 cases of non-

observance of Grice's conversational maxims in the series. As mentioned earlier, some cases belong to more than one category, but never into two categories of maxims.

MAXIM	QUALITY	QUANTITY	RELATION	MANNER
Number of cases	5	8	12	6

Table 5. The number of cases of non-observance of maxims.

As mentioned in section 2.4, flouting the maxim of relation is somewhat problematic. The high amount of cases in that category will therefore be discussed later on.

When considering the non-observance of maxims in relation to the general idea of humour as incongruence to what is expected, it can be suggested that since the basic supposition of discourse is cooperation, a speaker that is not cooperating is, at least in some ways, incongruous to that supposition – and therefore by extension such acts can, in their own right, be humorous. Moreover, the series uses humour in a variety of ways, and it is therefore not surprising that one way of constructing humour is to flout (or in some cases violate) maxims.

The maxim of quality, according to Finch, "in a sense underlies all the other maxims in that it assumes that we are speaking what we believe to be true" (159). As mentioned in 2.4, an outright lie would be a violation of that maxim, but flouting it is a somewhat more complex phenomenon. Nevertheless, hyperbole, meiosis, metaphors, euphemisms, irony and banter are all flouting the maxim of quality. It must be pointed out that I have left out irony and banter from this category altogether, since they have already been dealt with elsewhere.

In the following example on flouting the maxim of quantity by the means of hyperbole, Lorelai is in Yale for Rory's first day and has attended the orientation for parents.

LORELAI: Do you know how vulnerable you are to venereal disease?

RORY: All hail to the queen of the non-sequiturs.

LORELAI: This parent orientation I went to was a nonstop litany of the horrors awaiting college freshmen. You're supposed to carry a whistle, a flashlight, a crucifix, and a loaded Glock with you at all times.

Episode 4.2, time 13.19

Although Lorelai is being more or less serious with what she is saying, her ability to turn everything into a joke by exaggerating makes the utterance humoristic. She trusts Rory and has not a tendency to dwell on the negative, so although she is acknowledging the possible "horrors awaiting college freshmen", she is not worried for the safety of her daughter.

The cases of non-observance of maxims – regardless of the maxim – are a versatile phenomenon. There might not be any similarities between the "mechanisms" of flouting, other than the general rules cited earlier in section 2.4. For example, in this category there were two hyperboles, two cases of lies and a white lie. It is not surprising, though, that both of the hyperboles were uttered by Lorelai, as they fit her flamboyant sense of humour very well.

If the importance of the maxim of quality is that we expect others to be truthful, the importance of the maxim of quantity is that we expect others to give sufficient information. Finch reminds the importance of being able to judge when there is enough of information given, that is, not too much and not too little, since neither is cooperative according to the maxim of quantity (157). In fact, "learning to provide sufficient information is a skill that has to be acquired" (Finch, 158).

*Gilmore Girls* is known for its fast pace of speech. From the point of view of pragmatics, this means that the Gilmores are constantly flouting the maxim of quantity by



frequently giving more information than is necessarily needed (see e.g. section 4.1.2). Therefore, the more uncommon cases of providing too little information are more interesting.

RORY: Uh, the Ambroise building.

LORELAI: Which is?

RORY: The big, scary one.

LORELAI: Oh, great. Thanks for the input.

Episode 1.2, time 5.15

Both Lorelai and Rory are overwhelmed by the sheer size of Chilton and even finding the headmaster's office seems a daunting task. They have already made some comments as "off with their heads" and looking for a hunchback in the bell tower. It is noteworthy that Lorelai has most likely attended a school similar to Chilton before getting pregnant at sixteen, but she is still feeling very uncomfortable and uncertain of herself when she is forced go with Rory to meet with the headmaster. Here, the uncomfortable feeling manifests itself in Rory's very short and feeling-laden answer to her mother. Here, the humour (intent to amuse) is, again, in the way the two women who never seem to be quiet are suddenly keeping their answers to a bare minimum. Lorelai is unable to attain her normal state of mind when discussing with the headmaster, especially when Emily has come to the meeting unannounced. Only when Lorelai and Emily are walking together out of the building is Lorelai finally back to her true self. The humour then shifts from "the uncomfortable Lorelai" to the "bickering mother and daughter".

The third maxim, that of manner, is constituted of but one rule: be relevant. As mentioned earlier, flouting and violating the maxim of relation is rare since the basic supposition of any discussion is that what has been said is relevant. But this is not to say

there would not be ways to exploit the manner of relation for humoristic purposes, since there is always the possibility of deliberately mistaking an ambiguous item. In fact, the majority of cases in the series (8/12 in the data) show this, as there are a lot of deliberate misunderstandings and otherwise seemingly unrelated comments that humorously take an advantage of the maxim of relation.

MR. BYNES: Didn't you read the papers?

LUKE: Yeah, the Red Sox lost by three, Bush is at the ranch chatting up a Swiss dude.

MR. BYNES: The divorce papers.

LUKE: I know what you meant. Look, I didn't kill anyone. Nicole and I just kind of accidentally got married and now we want out. We both want the same thing.

Episode 4.2, time 05.58

This may not be strictly non-observance of the manner of relation, but it is clear that Luke knows what is meant by papers – he even says so himself. But he is not interested in dealing with the lawyer and is trying to avoid his company and questions. He is avoiding answering his questions by multiple strategies, but in this case his strategy is to pretend that the lawyer is referring to the news papers, not the divorce papers. These strategies are highly ineffective and he does not get rid of the unwanted company until he finds a way of beating them in their own game, asking for compensation of time that he wasted listening to a man playing water glasses on the cruise where Luke met and married his wife. The fact that his evasive replies are highly ineffective is not surprising, since what the lawyers want is cooperation and he is not being cooperative at all, as he is not even following the Cooperative Principle of communication.

The last maxim to be discussed is the maxim of manner. The differences between the non-observance of maxim of quantity and maxim of manner may not be self-evident, especially since the maxim of manner includes the rule of being brief. The difference may be simplified to saying that whereas the maxim of quantity has to do with the overall amount of information, the maxim of manner refers to the way in which it is given, that is, is more a property of the sentence itself. In flouting the maxim of manner, the speaker is obscure or ambiguous, giving the information in a lengthier manner that is actually needed.

RORY: [of a pose] How about this?

LORELAI: Yeah, you know the stick we were talking about before? It looks like it's somewhere else now.

RORY: You're having serious Annie Leibovitz delusions here.

Episode 4.2, time 01.17

Lorelai and Rory are packing Rory's things and going leaving for Yale. Lorelai is in being the eager and somewhat possessive mother, who wants to take pictures of everything. In their "pre-leaving jitter", the two are mainly bickering with each other, in the loving manner that is characteristic for them. Rory has commented earlier on Lorelai's inability to drive the car with a manual gearbox she borrowed from Luke by saying that "You can stir coffee with a stick, but you can't drive a stick". Now, in the dialogue above, Lorelai could have simply said that Rory's pose is not to her taste, but since they have both been taking advantage of any opportunity to say something a little nasty, she opts for a more humoristic, and possibly hurtful, approach as a way to get even with Rory's. Rory, on the other hand, accuses of her mother of thinking too much of her abilities in photography, referring to the iconic American portrait photographer, Annie Leibovitz.

The overall feel of the series is that it is quite sarcastic. Even though the bickering between Lorelai and Emily is disregarded, much of the humour in the series has a very faint negative tone. Stars Hollow is a close-knit community, and Lorelai and Rory are exceptionally close even for the town. The mutual appreciation between the townspeople enables them to tease one another by saying something slightly mean since they know that the other one will not be offended. Therefore, even when the humour might be offensive, the underlying feeling is love/friendship and appreciation. Naturally, sometimes love and appreciation are the overt feelings:

RICHARD: [handing an envelope to Rory] For Fez.

RORY: But Grandpa, you already took care of Fez.

RICHARD: Fez is a very large city.

Episode 1.6, time 39.50

In this example, Richard is handing Rory a brown envelope before he leaves Rory's second 16<sup>th</sup> birthday party held in Stars Hollow. The first one was held in Hartford by Emily according to the expectations (social and other) of the upper class, disregarding that Rory hardly knew anyone. At the party, Richard (and the majority of the older male guests) handed Rory a money envelope, in addition to a formal gift from him and his wife. So, in this instance, Rory has already received plenty of gifts, and Richard has not forgotten this, but rather sees this as an opportunity to celebrate their newly found closeness and support Rory's wishes to travel around the world. Since Richard is flouting the maxim of manner, his response to Rory's objections is obscure, but the underlying information is not: Rory should keep the money and make sure she makes her dreams come true.

It is difficult to give exhaustive lists on how maxims are flouted for humoristic purposes, because there are no boundaries. The maxims have been flouted for both too

much and too little information, for feelings of resentment and feelings of closeness. Some characters flout the maxims deliberately, some are unaware of what they are doing. The most frequent flouter is, again, Lorelai, but there are altogether seven different flouters, which is a lot considering that there are altogether 15 users of humour in the data. It is noteworthy, however, that Emily is not flouting the maxims at all. In fact, since she is a firm believer in rules and what is proper, it is only feasible that she always adheres to the rules of conversation, as well. Nevertheless, it can be argued that flouting a maxim is an easy way of engendering humour, because what is being said need not be as humorous when there is the incongruence in the behaviour, meaning that the Cooperative Principle is not being adhered to. An easy way of engendering humour or not, the variety in which the maxims are flouted is in unison of the series on the whole: verbally expressed humour in it is witty, not adhering to rules, and versatile.

## 5 Conclusion

In this thesis I have discussed the way in which verbally expressed humour has been used in *Gilmore Girls*. I have shown that it is both versatile in the way in which it utilises the possibilities of humour, and in the way in which humour is used. There were altogether 10 categories into which the humour in the series was divided. There are cases in all of the ten categories, although the category which is the object of most studies in humour research, that is, jokes, only consisted of one case. The same applies to the types of humour that do not often occur in normal, everyday speech, namely parody and satire. The type of humour that is often regarded as stale and not necessarily intellectual at all, meaning pun, did not appear in the data and has therefore not been counted in the categories at all although it is introduced in the theory because of its prominence (second to jokes) in the traditional humour research.

I have also shown that Lorelai is by far the most frequent and versatile user of humour. Lorelai's humour is almost over-the-top in many instances, especially in situations where she feels at home. In general, Lorelai's humour represents her current mood and her self-image in the situation. Humour is her main strategy when she interacts with people, and it is therefore unfortunate that there is a tendency of her insecurity showing in her humour. She is still somewhat a wild child, and although she successfully manoeuvres through the challenges of her working place, she is unable to hide her uncertainty in certain situations, and as a result, the talented user of humour becomes anything but talented. She is still deploying her normal strategy, but her humour does not have the same edge, and it most certainly does not amuse the (most often upper class) hearers. In familiar surroundings, that is, her home town, the other-worldly Stars Hollow, she is a confident and

well-liked member of the community and there are very few instances where her humour does not hit the mark, especially since the humour she uses is at its best there.

Lorelai's humour in relation to her family is one of the key interests of this thesis. I have shown that whenever Lorelai and Rory "joke" together, their humour represents the closeness they share. They might tease one another, but they both enjoy being teased by their close ones, so this is still a way of maintaining their relationship. Rory is not nearly as versatile in her humour, and her style differs significantly from her mother. Rory has a habit of bantering her mother especially when she gets carried away, but this does not cause any friction since Lorelai is not afraid to make a fool of herself, and is perfectly capable of laughing at herself. But where Lorelai and Rory have a great relationship and a great time together, Lorelai's relationship to her parents, Emily and Richard, is markedly different. The humour that Lorelai uses with or in the company of Emily is much more negative and lacks the warmth of the humour between Lorelai and Rory. But there is also another significant lack in the inter-familial humour: humour between Emily and Rory or Richard and Lorelai. This is not to say that these pairs never use humour around one another, but that there is markedly less humour when compared to Emily and Lorelai or Lorelai and Rory.

Since humour is used in the series for explaining and illustrating relationships between characters, it is not surprising that humour is also used for defining between "good" and "bad" characters, the inner and outer circle. The inner circle is most definitely Lorelai and Rory and their friends in Stars Hollow, who all appreciate and use, if perhaps only occasionally, verbally expressed humour. The outer circle consists of almost everyone outside Stars Hollow, and some of the townspeople, as well, such as Mrs. Kim. An

interesting group is formed by the older Gilmores and characters such as Michel, who do use humour, but it is different to that used by the inner circle.

One of the issues discussed in this thesis has been the use of different forms of humour in the series. They are mostly dealt with from the point of view of how Lorelai uses humour, since she is the most versatile user of humour. The examples in this thesis have been chosen mostly on the grounds of how well they represent Lorelai's humour, rather than how well they represent the category to which they belong. Therefore, some of the examples may have been somewhat "fuzzy" ones, as representative of their category as penguins are of birds. This is not problematic, however, since this thesis is not interested of the construction of verbally expressed humour but of its use. What this thesis has proved, then, is that especially sarcasm is used in the series for both closeness and distance, but also to signal Lorelai's confidence. Other categories may not have similar, clearly distinctive purposes, but they do not contradict with the findings, either. Humour in the series is laden with information of the speaker and his/her status, not to mention his/her relationship to and feelings towards the recipient.

One of the key guidelines in the thesis when considering humour on the whole is that "amusement is an intellectual reaction to something that is unexpected, illogical, or inappropriate in some other way" (Morreall, *Taking Laughter Seriously*, 15), meaning that the main theory of humour considered in the incongruity theory. Although incongruity may not be sufficient enough on its own, it is still the underlying notion of much of the humour in the data. While the data includes only one joke so there are not any punchlines to speak of, there are plenty of cases of humour that rely on incongruity, be it on the level of speech, social norms, or the like. One such source of humour that relies entirely on incongruity is the flouting of Grice's maxims. This is, partly, because the main supposition of



communication is that the speakers are cooperating, and that what is being said is truthful, relevant, delivered in an orderly manner and gives sufficient information for the hearer to get the right picture of what is being said. When Grice's maxims are being flouted, these rules are being bent if not broken, that is, inappropriate when considering communication on the whole. This way of generating humour by flouting maxims makes it an easy form of humour, since what is being said does not necessarily have to be so funny since it is the implication of the utterance that makes it funny. Since flouting the maxims is an easy way of engendering humour, there is little cohesion between the examples in any given category. This is not to say that the examples are not interesting from point of view of this thesis, but that it is difficult to offer any conclusive suggestions on how and to what purposes maxims are flouted in the series. Moreover, humour is both context-bound and subjective, which further makes the task of explaining the humour in the series challenging, as it is sometimes difficult to explain the context in a concise but still comprehensive manner so that the reader can fully appreciate the example.

I want to point out the underlying difficulty of this thesis. It is safe to say that there is some overlapping in the terms used in humour research, not to mention a lack of a universal definition of humour, itself. This is not surprising in any way, but Attardo comments the lack of clear definition of humour and its subdivisions from various viewpoints. In fact, according to him "linguists, psychologists, and anthropologists have taken to humor to be an all-encompassing category, covering any event or object that elicits laughter, amuses, or is felt to be funny" (*Linguistic Theories of Humour*, 4), and that the lack of restrictions is highly desirable. This is not the case, however, in every field of research, as Attardo points out. In the field of literary criticism, "the importance of clear subdivisions is more keenly felt" (Attardo *Linguistic Theories of Humour*, 4). This applies

to this thesis, as well, as the main focus of the thesis is on categorizing humour. Deciding what is and what is not (verbally expressed) humour has been challenging at times. In addition, the series, and by extension its humour, is imitating real life, which makes it both interesting and challenging to categorize, since it seldom follows the rules of humour – rules formulated by researchers – to the letter. In addition, the scripted nature of it makes it possible for humour to appear where the speaker might not have really intended it, since it is the cast of writers that are trying to amuse the viewer, not the character. This results in examples that do not necessarily strike the reader of this thesis as humorous, if the context is not revealed. All of this considered, it is quite certain that there would be entirely different interpretations on the source material should someone else have collected and analysed the data. The same applies to the themes discussed in this thesis: they have arisen from the text as important ones, but that is not to say that the themes discussed here would be the only possible ones.

In conclusion, I have shown that the humour in *Gilmore Girls* is versatile, especially when considering that it is essentially a family drama, all be it hybridized with comedy. The series utilizes a variety of ways in which verbally expressed humour may be constructed, as it is not afraid to break any rules. This is not to say that the humour would always be rule and ground breaking, but it is witty and resourceful. As mentioned earlier, the humour is laden with information of the speaker and his/her status, his/her relationship to and feelings towards the hearer and his/her confidence in the situation.

*Gilmore Girls* is a worthy subject of study since it, despite all of its excessiveness, is suggestive of the importance of humour, and using humour creatively, has in our everyday life. One possible research subject in the future would be to study how well other drama comedies represent everyday language and everyday use of humour, since the

hybridization of the genre gives other drama comedies similar possibilities to mimic humour in everyday life in a way that a sitcom will never do.

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## FINNISH SUMMARY

Verbaalisen huumorin tutkimus on keskittynyt semanttisten teorioiden kehittämiseen ja soveltamiseen. Tämä tutkimus puolestaan keskittyy huumorin pragmaattisiin aspekteihin, eli miten huumoria käytetään ja miten sitä muodostetaan amerikkalaisessa televisiosarjassa. Tutkimuksen lähtökohtana ovat yleiset huumorin teorit, erityisesti inkongruenssiteoria. John Morreallin mukaan inkongruenssiteorian kannalta "huvittuneisuus on älyllinen reaktio johonkin, joka on odottamatonta, epäloogista tai jollakin muulla tavalla epäsopivaa" (*Taking Laughter Seriously*, 15, oma suomennos). Tämä on siis perusolettamus tässä tutkimuksessa, vaikka analyysissä itse inkongruenssiin onkin keskitytty hyvin vähän.

Ennen itse tutkimusta on syytä selittää työssä käytetyistä termeistä tärkein. Englanninkielinen "verbal humour" eli verbaalihuumori on kielellisen huumorin tutkimuksessa yleisimmin käytössä, osaltaan ehkä myös siksi, että sillä tarkoitetaan sekä huumoria, joka leikittelee kieliopillisilla järjestelmillä sekä huumoria jota esitetään kielellisesti. Tästä syystä tässä tutkimuksessa käytetään termiä "verbally expressed humour" eli verbaalisesti esitetty huumori, joka sisältää siis kaiken kielellisesti esitetyn huumorin (puhuttua, kirjoitettu ym.) huolimatta siitä perustuuko huumori kieliopillisille seikoille vai onko sen esitystapa vain kielellinen (vrt. fyysinen huumori).

Tutkimuksen aineistona on käytetty viittä jaksoa televisiosarjasta *Gilmoren tytöt* (*Gilmore Girls*). Neljä jaksoista on ensimmäiseltä tuotantokaudelta (esitetty kotimaassaan vuonna 2000) ja yksi neljänneltä (esitetty 2004). Jaksot on valittu melko sattumanvaraisesti, mutta neljännen tuotantokauden jakso on valittu siinä esiintyvän rekisterihuumorin takia.



*Gilmoren tytöt* on draamakomedia yksinhuoltajaäidistä, Lorelai Gilmoresta, ja hänen (sarjan alkaessa) 16-vuotiaasta tyttärestään Rorysta. Lorelai on yläluokkaisen pariskunnan ainoa lapsi, joka karkasi kotoaan 16-vuotiaana ollessaan raskaana. Tämän jälkeen Lorelai ei ole ollut juurikaan tekemisissä vanhempiensa kanssa, vaikka Emily ja Richard Gilmore asuvatkin puolen tunnin ajomatkan päässä. Lorelain ja Roryn läheinen ja lämmin, sisarussuhdetta muistuttava suhde ja Lorelain etäinen, kylmä suhde vanhempiinsa ovat sarjan kantavia teemoja – myös silloin, kun tarkastellaan sarjassa käytettyä huumoria.

Äiti-tytärsuhteiden lisäksi eräs tärkeä osa-alue sarjassa on myös Lorelain ja Roryn fiktiivinen kotikaupunki Stars Hollow, sillä se antaa kummallisuudessaan puitteet Lorelain ja Roryn toiminnalle. Yleisesti Stars Hollown toiminnalle puitteet antaa puolestaan draamakomedian hybridigenre, sillä se mahdollistaa niin draamallisten kuin komediallisten ainesten käytön samassa sarjassa toisin kuin jos kyseessä olisi vain draama tai vain komedia.

Tutkimuksen tulosten mukaan sarjassa käytetään huumoria hyvin monipuolisesti. Lorelai on huumorinkäyttäjistä ehdottomasti ahkerin ja luovin, mutta myös Rory ja Lorelain vanhemmat käyttävät kielellistä huumoria. Lorelain ja Roryn suhteessa huumoria käytetään osoittamaan sitä lämpöä ja ystävyyttä, joka heidän välisessä suhteessaan on paljon. Vaikka Roryn huumorintaju on huomattavasti "tylsempi" kuin Lorelain, he molemmat antavat tilaa toisilleen. Näiden kahden välinen humoristinen kiusoittelu on hyvin yleistä, joskin Rory kiusoittelee äitiään enemmän. Tämä johtuu lähinnä siitä, että Lorelai hulluttelee tyttärtään enemmän, ja tytär ottaa osaa äitinsä hullutuksiin vitsailemalla tämän kustannuksella.

Siinä missä Lorelai ja Rory vitsailevat usein hyvántahtoisesti keskenään, Lorelai käyttää huumoria Emilyn kanssa negatiiviseen sävyyn. Lorelain ja Roryn huumori on

yhdistävää, Lorelain ja Emilyn huumori on etäännyttävää. Niin Lorelai kuin Emilykin ovat yhdessä hyvin sarkastisia, mutta Lorelain strategia on yleensä käyttää huumoria tavalla, joka ylläpitää tiettyä etäisyyttä heidän välillään. Lorelain negatiivinen huumori onkin lähes yksinomaan suunnattu Emilyä kohtaan – Richard on kohteena vain ani harvoin. Huumorin puuttuminen Richardin ja Lorelain suhteesta ei ole kuitenkaan positiivinen yksityiskohta, sillä Lorelain tärkein strategia hänen kommunikoidessa ihmisten kanssa on käyttää huumoria ja huumorin puute on omalta osaltaan läheisyyden puutteen osoitus.

Yksi kolmesta analyysin osa-alueesta on ollut tutkia, miten huumoria käytetään. Sen lisäksi, että sitä käytetään ihmissuhteiden kuvailuun, käytetään huumoria myös kuvailemaan itse henkilöhahmoja. Hahmot *Gilmoren tytöissä* onkin jaettavissa karkeasti kolmeen ryhmään: huumoria käyttävät sisäpiiriläiset, huumoria käyttämättömät ulkopiiriläiset ja huumoria käyttävät keskiapiiriläiset. Sisäpiiriin kuuluvat luonnollisesti Lorelai ja Rory sekä Stars Hollown asukkaat. Jälkimmäiset eivät itse välttämättä käytä kielellistä huumoria kuin harvoin, mutta he toimivat vastaanottavaisena yleisönä Lorelain ja Roryn huumorille. Ulkopiiriin kuuluvat ulkopuoliset – myös Stars Hollowssa. Tärkein ulkopiiriläisten ryhmä ovat oppilaat, heidän vanhempansa ja henkilökunta yksityiskoulussa, johon Rory on hyväksytty kesken lukuvuotta ja kouluastetta. Suurin osa koulun oppilaista on yläluokkaista alkuperää, ja yläluokka onkin yksi yleisistä ulkopiiriläisten ryhmistä, olivatpa he Chiltonissa tai vierailijoina pienessä hotellissa, jossa Lorelai työskentelee johtajana. Yksittäiset Stars Hollown asukkaatkin ovat ulkopiiriläisiä, mutta enimmäkseen siksi, että he ovat ulkopuolisia myös muuten. Eräs tällaisista on rouva Kim, Roryn parhaan ystävän äiti, joka on korealainen maahanmuuttaja. Rouva Kim edustaa humorintajuttoman aasialaisnaisen stereotypiaa, myös siinä, että hän ei ole halunnut sopeutua amerikkalaiseen kulttuuriin.

Kolmanteen, "keskiäpiiriläisten" ryhmään kuuluvat ovat mielenkiintoinen yhdistelmä huumorintajuttomuutta ja huumoria. Siinä missä rouva Kim on sekä maahanmuuttaja että huumorintajuton, Michel Gerard on hahmona yhtä lailla stereotyyppinen käsitys ylimielisestä ranskalaisesta, mutta sillä erotuksella että hän käyttää huumoria. Michelin huumori ja käytös on vain selkeästi ilkeää eikä hänkään halua sopeutua amerikkalaiseen kulttuuriin. Näin ollen hän ei ole sisäpiiriläinen. Ilkeä huumori pitää myös Emilyn ja Richardin poissa lämpimästä ja leppoisasta sisäpiiristä, vaikka huumorintajuttomiksi näitä kahta ei voi kuvailla. Yhteistä Michelille, Emilylle ja Richardille on, että he eivät pidä Lorelain huumoria hauskana, eivätkä he myöskään arvosta muita Stars Hollown asukkaita.

Henkilösuhteiden lisäksi tutkimuksessa tarkastellaan millaista huumoria sarjassa käytetään. Aineistoksi valikoituneet 127 kielellisen huumorin käyttötapausta jaettiin kymmeneen kategoriaan: vitsit, sarkasmi, ironia, (verbaalinen) parodia, (verbaalinen) satiiri, vitsailu (banter), rekisterihuumori, kielellinen leikittely (word play) ja alluusio. Viimeisen kategorian muodostivat "asioiden sanominen hauskasti" (saying things funny, STF), eli huumori, jossa ei ole nähtävillä selkeää mekanismia mutta jossa (vakavakin) asia on esitetty humoristisessa muodossa. Tutkimuksessa havaittiin, että jokaiseen kategoriaan tuli vähintään yksi esimerkki. Selkeästi aliedustettuina olivat mm. vitsit ( $n=1$ ). Tämä ei ole yllättävää, sillä vaikka draamakomedian genre antaa erinäisiä mahdollisuuksia, suoranaiset vitsit eivät kuulu luontevasti sen piiriin, ainakaan tässä sarjassa. Myös parodiasta ja satiirista aineistosta oli vain yksi esimerkki kummastakin. Koska sarja jäljittelee tosielämää puhetapoineen ja käytöksineen, ei ole yllättävää, että luonteeltaan hyvin esivalmistellut parodia ja satiiri eivät ole suuresti edustettuina.

Sarjassa käytetään huumoria erilaista huumoria laajasti. Kaksi käytetyintä huumorin muotoa olivat sarkasmi ja vitsailu (banter), joista molemmista oli 22 esimerkkiä. Sarkasmi

on myös käyttötavoiltaan laajin huumorin muoto, sillä sen avulla Lorelai osoittaa esimerkiksi läheisyyttä tai etäisyyttä toiseen ihmiseen. Sarkasmilla Lorelai osoittaa myös omaa hyvää itsetuntoaan – etenkin miesten seurassa. Johtuen siitä, että sarja imitoi todellisuutta, ei huumorin käyttö ole muilta osin kaavamaisista vaan hyvin monipuolista, eikä siitä siksi voida tehdä pitäviä johtopäätöksiä. Muut huumorin lajit toimivat silti kaikki samaan tapaan siinä, että ne sisältävät paljon tietoa henkilöiden välisistä suhteista.

Analyysin kolmas osa keskittyi H. Paul Gricen muodostamiin keskustelumaksiimeihin ja siihen, miten niitä rikotaan huumorin luomiseksi. Gricen maksiimit perustuvat yhteistyön periaatteelle (Cooperative Principle, CP), siis että kahden ihmisen välisessä keskustelussa molemmat osapuolet pyrkivät yhteistyöhön. Laadun, määrän, yhtenäisyyden ja tavan maksiimit määrittelevät edelleen, että puhujan antaman tiedon pitäisi olla totta, määrältään riittävää, aiheeseen nähden oleellista ja se pitäisi esittää selkeästi, epäselvyyksiä ja monitulkintaisuutta välttäen. Maksimeja voidaan kuitenkin uhmata (flout) tai rikkoa, ja joskus tällainen rikkominen on humoristista. Tutkimuksessa löydettiin yhteensä 31 esimerkkiä maksiimien rikkomisesta. Koska tällaisen huumorin kenttä on laaja – jokaista rikkomista yhdistää vain se, että sääntöä on rikottu – on näitä rikkomisia tutkittu vain yksittäin analysoiden sitä, mitä kullakin tapauksella on saatu aikaan.

Ylipäätään sarjassa käytetystä huumorista voidaan todeta, että se käyttää huumoria monipuolisesti – etenkin kun kyseessä on draamakomedia eikä pelkästään komedia. Sarjassa huumori on hyvin informatiivista, sillä se sisältää tietoa puhujan statuksesta, suhteesta ja tunteista kuulijahahmoon sekä puhujan itseluottamuksesta tilanteessa. Huumori sarjassa ei ole välttämättä urauurtavaa tai rajoja rikkovaa, mutta se on kekseliästä ja se käyttää luovasti hyväksi huumorin erilaisia mahdollisuuksia. *Gilmoren*

*tytöt* on myös hyvä tutkimuskohde, sillä se – ylilyönneistään huolimatta – antaa viitteitä siitä, mikä merkitys huumorilla ja sen monipuolisella käytöllä on oikeassa elämässä, sekä miten sitä kielennetään.